

# THE LIFE AND TROUBLES OF MR. BOWSER

BY  
G.B. LEWIS [M. QUAD]





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The Life and Troubles  
OF  
MR. BOWSER

BEING A VERACIOUS AND AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT  
OF SOME OF HIS DOINGS AT HOME AND  
ABROAD WITH MRS. BOWSER IN THE  
FOREGROUND TO ASSIST IN MAIN-  
TAINING THE INTERESTS OF  
THE GENERAL NARRATIVE

*By M. Quad*  
[C. B. LEWIS]

WHO WAS MORE OR LESS PRESENT ON EACH SPE-  
CIFIC OCCASION, AND WHOSE DESIGN IS TO  
ENCOURAGE THE WIVES OF THE LAND TO  
THROW OFF THE YOKE OF DOMESTIC  
TYRANNY AND RISE TO A POSI-  
TION FROM WHICH THEY  
CAN "SASS BACK."

**With Numerous Illustrations**

RUBBER TIRES ON ALL THE WHEELS AND  
THE COVERS FASTENED ON IN THE  
MOST STRENUOUS MANNER

THOMPSON & THOMAS,  
CHICAGO.

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## Author's Preface



Come, now, but if you are a married man you know how it is. We are all Bowsters, and it is no use to lay it onto "the other feller." We are full of quirks and quips, and there are lots of times when we realize that we ought to be booted around the block for kicking up rows over trifles. I hope, however, that we are all growing better instead of worse, and that the time will come when we can regard the sum total of the gas bill with complacent philosophy, and not charge the wife with domestic extravagance and a desire to head the way to the poor-house. Down in our hearts we give her all due credit for her many attributes, and we rise up in the morning after a misunderstanding, feeling that she is the most loving and faithful of all the earth. She knows our eccentricities and bears with them and strives ever for home happiness, and only after the shadow of death has come between do we know how much we miss her.

M. QUAD.

Leslie C. Brown

Rev 22 Jan 43





## Dedication

*To the tens of thousands of wives  
who have to "grin and bear it"  
to keep peace in the family.*



# THE LIFE AND TROUBLES OF MR. BOWSER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MR. BOWSER BECOMES A VEGETARIAN.

Dinner was waiting Mr. Bowser the other evening when he came home, but he hung off about it in a queer way, and when Mrs. Bowser pressed him for an explanation he hesitatingly replied:

"I have determined on a little change in the daily program, and I shall not eat any regular meals after this."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Mrs. Bowser, has it ever occurred to you that civilized and enlightened man is heir to exactly 236 different bodily ailments?"

"But what has that got to do with your going without dinner?"

"That's the keynote of the whole thing, my dear. Of the 236 ailments, no less than 225 are brought on by the food we eat. It's meat, pastry and grease which are slaying their tens of thousands every year. It's no wonder that I have been ailing for

the last ten years and could find no relief in medical treatment."

"And so you've got another fad?" sighed Mrs. Bowser in despair.

"I don't exactly understand you," he stiffly replied. "It is my duty to myself and to my family to cure my ailments if possible, and I shall proceed to do so. If it's a fad to rid one's self of rheumatism, vertigo, heart disease, rush of blood, nervous prostration and dyspepsia, then I suppose I've got one. You can go down to dinner; I shall eat mine right here."

"But what will you eat?"

"A vegetable or two. I am done with fats and grease and sweets. For a few weeks, at least, I shall live as Adam lived and as Nature intended man to live."

Mrs. Bowser said no more, but went to the dining room to eat her dinner alone. When she returned it was to find Mr. Bowser chewing away at a raw carrot. She had opened her mouth to ask him if he intended to become a horse, when he blandly said:

"We will now resume the discussion. That is, I will say that I have become a vegetarian. When I inform you that there are at least 1,000,000 people in this country who live on a vegetable diet from week to week you will understand that there is no fad about it. Nature intended man to drink cold

water and live on fruits and vegetables. Up to the time he began to eat meats and pastry he was strong as an ox and never had a pain. Cookery has made a semi-invalid of him. When this is made plain to you, you will admire my course in taking up Nature's diet."

"Why don't you go about dressed as a savage and sleep under a bush?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

"I may before I get through. The first thing, however, is to get my stomach in order. Do you know the properties of raw carrot? Of course you don't. Let me inform you that carrot contains eight per cent more nutriment than porterhouse steak. A carrot weighing two pounds will sustain life longer than three pounds of veal or mutton. This evening I shall eat one carrot, one turnip and one onion, and drink one pint of water. The per cent of nutriment will be greater than if I had sat down to a banquet."

"Well, if you have any ailments I hope you will get rid of them. It would seem like living if you would let one week pass without trying some silly experiment on your health."

"Look here, woman!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he jumped up so suddenly that he almost choked on a piece of his carrot. "I don't like your talk! You forget who I am. You sneer at my ailments and are sarcastic regarding the remedies. Perhaps you are disappointed because I don't drop dead.

Is it silly to strive for perfect health? Is it silly to want to be strong and rugged? If you were eating raw carrot to cure yourself of some chronic ailment, do you suppose I would sit in front of you and sneer and gibe and be sarcastic? If I did I should feel that I ought to be thrown out doors."

He sat down to his munching, and silence reigned. That is, silence reigned as far as possible with his biting into the carrot at intervals with the strength of a horse. It was a corpulent, solid carrot, weighing over a pound, and though Mr. Bowser had had enough when he had eaten a third of it, he devoured the remainder on general principles and to spite Mrs. Bowser. Half an hour later he began on a turnip as big as his fist. It was as solid as hickory, but he munched away until all had disappeared. He would gladly have dispensed with the onion, but having brought it home and included it in his list, he felt bound to crowd it down. Tears came to his eyes and he swore softly to himself as he used his teeth, but he knew that Mrs. Bowser was watching him out of the corner of her eyes and he stuck to it. When he wiped his eyes he got up and sauntered about, and finally observed:

"Mrs. Bowser, it may be that you have heard of a man named Samson?"

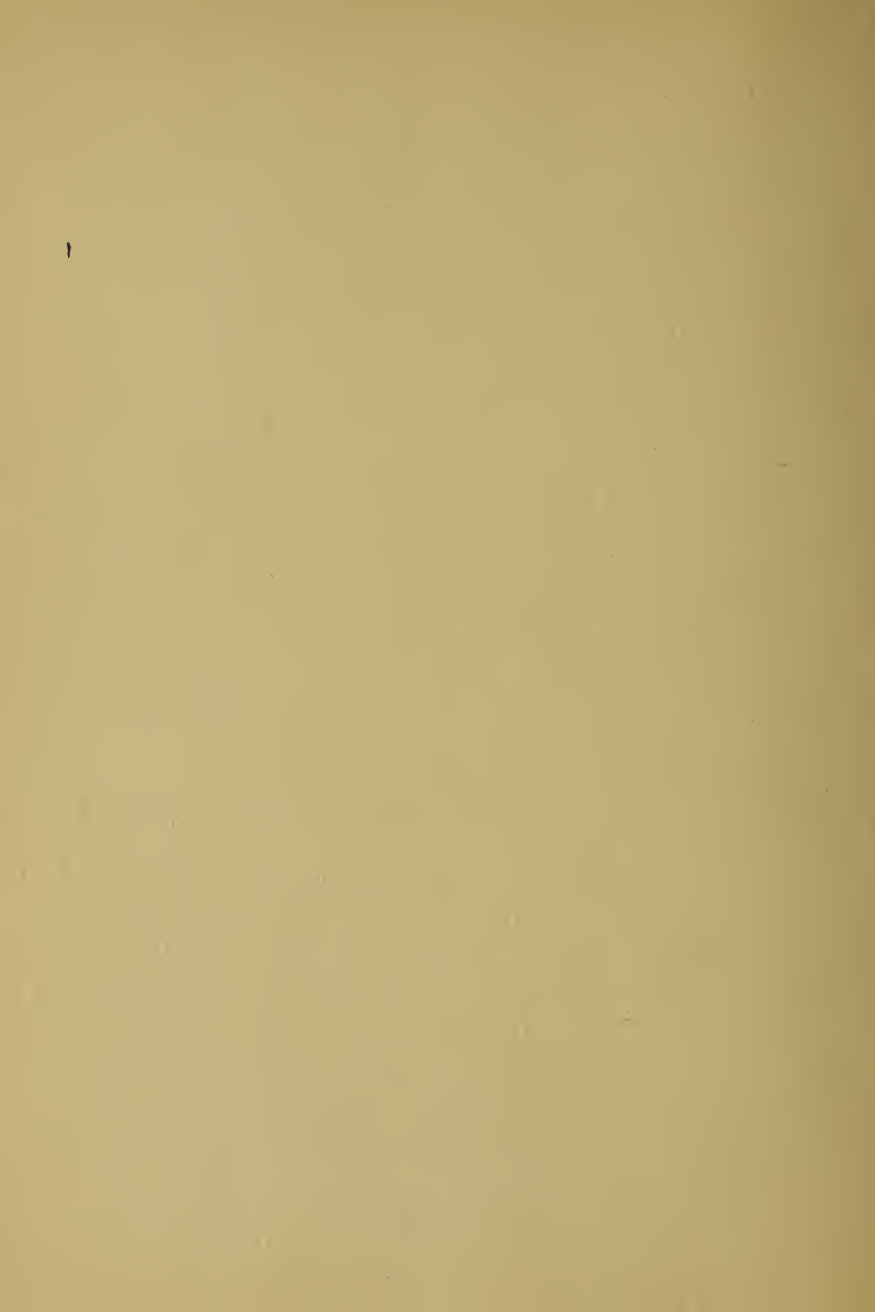
"Yes," she replied.

"What did he do to distinguish himself?"





"LOOK HERE, WOMAN!!!"



"Pulled down the pillars of a temple, I believe."

"Ah! I'm proud to find you so well posted. Yes, Samson pulled down the pillars of a temple and thereby brought death to scores of his enemies, but could he have done the wreck if he had been living on fats and sweets? His food was fruits and vegetables, his drink the waters of the bubbling spring or the babbling brook. If such a diet gave Samson his great strength——"

"But you forget that after his locks were shorn he lost his strength," interrupted Mrs. Bowser.

Mr. Bowser realized that he had been thrown down, but after a moment's thought he was ready to bring Hercules forward. Hercules had no long locks to be shorn of, and was a living proof of vegetarian diet. Raw onions, carrots, parsnips and turnips had formed his week-day meals, and on Sundays he had added potatoes or string beans.

"And perhaps you'll tell me where Hercules got his strength?" he demanded as he worked up the muscles in his arms and kicked out his legs. "And where was Sysiphus and Achilles and——"

"Why don't you includes Socrates, Pliny and Nero?" asked Mrs. Bowser. "Why what's the matter with you? You are white as a sheet, and your knees are wobbling like clothes-props."

"I—I've got it!" groaned Mr. Bowser as he slowly slid from his chair to the floor with his hands locked across his body.

"Got what! What is it! Are you suffering?"

"Got colic! Great Scots, but I'm being tied up in knots! I don't believe I'll live five minutes! Do something for me or I'm a dead man!"

"It's that carrot," she said as she helped him up and over to the lounge. "Can't you remember what Samson and Hercules did when a great big raw carrot played circus with 'em?"

"But I can't stand it!" he groaned, as he drew his knees up to his chin and rolled his eyes to the ceiling. "Get mustard—get a doctor—get the hot-water bag! U—m—m! Whoop!"

Mrs. Bowser didn't waste any time over family remedies. A telephone message to the family doctor brought him to the house almost as soon as she had taken Mr. Bowser's shoes off. There was an hour of groans, grunts, hot cloths and prescriptions before the doctor could leave his patient. During the hour he hadn't said much and Mrs. Bowser hadn't once mentioned the vegetarian business. When ready to depart, however, the medical man sent her out of the room, and, bending over the patient in a fatherly way and speaking as a brother might, he said:

"Samson Hercules Bowser, you are going to live through this, but I want to tell you something."

"Y—Yes, doctor, you are sure I will live?"

"Reasonably sure, but I think you are the big-

gest fool in America! Good night, sir, and don't eat a load of hay because Balaam's ass did!"

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Mr. Bowser had come home at mid-afternoon with a spade and rake on his shoulder, and closely following him was a boy with several pots of plants and a package of seeds. Before Mrs. Bowser could ask for an explanation she was informed:

"You were saying the other day that you wished we had a bit of garden. I'm going to make one. I've got it all planned out, and I'll fix up something to be proud of."

"But our back yard is no place for a garden," she protested. "It's mostly in the shade, you know, and the soil must be very poor. I wish you had spoken about it before you bought these things."

"Don't you worry about the shade or the poor soil, my dear woman. I shall grow only such things as love the shade, and a little guano will make the soil get up and hump in a way to astonish you."

"Besides, I have a special object in view. I will now get into an old suit and prepare the various beds. Digging and raking and smelling the fresh earth will carry me back to the old farm days again."

When he had changed his clothes, he laid off a plot in the back yard and began work.

The brickbats, old bottles, slates and broken ket-

tles had remained undisturbed for years, but Farmer Bowser persisted until at the end of three hours he had prepared a bed ten feet long by three feet wide.

During his labors he burst his suspenders, broke his spade, pulled the handle out of the rake and lost an eye out of his spectacles, but he won out in the end.

When the bed was ready, he called Mrs. Bowser out and said:

"This, you understand, is only preliminary. I have prepared this for an experimental bed. Later on I will lay the whole yard out into circles, crescents, crosses, etc."

"What sort of experiments?" she asked.

"I will inform you later on this evening. I shall rather mix things up in this bed. I shall set out onions, tomatoes and flowers, and I shall plant the seeds of cucumbers and melons and potatoes and add a few hills of corn."

"I should think that a few apple trees, a grape arbor and an artificial lake would help things along," she observed.

"Just so. I was expecting you to say something mean. When you understand my object, however, you may change your mind. I shall now proceed to sow and plant, and when I have finished you can send the cook out to gather the 5,000 clothespins, the 3,000 forks and the 2,000 spoons I have



dug up in making this small bed. I do not wish to find fault—no husband ever does—but if you could only manage to plant what few dishes we have left out here somewhere we could eat off the ironing board with our fingers.”

There were two clothespins, one old fork and a broken spoon in sight, but Mrs. Bowser didn't dispute his figures. He had regained his good nature before dinner was over, and after the meal he assumed the patronizing air of the average husband and said:

“I informed you that I had a special object in mixing up things in that bed, and I will now explain it. Did you ever give a thought to the vegetation around you?”

“Yes, several of them.”

“I am glad to know it, and I will mark it in your favor. What theory have you got as to why seeds grow?”

“It doesn't need any theory. Nature intended everything to reproduce itself. If a seed is planted in fertile soil, it will produce again.”

“But there must be favorable influences.”

“Of course. It needs sun and rain.”

“Anything else, Mrs. Bowser?”

“Nothing special, I guess.”

“What about the moon?”

“Why, I believe that some old grannies contend that the moon has some sort of influence on vege-

tation, but I don't think that any level headed farmer believes it."

That was the point Mr. Bowser had been leading up to, and there was the light of triumph in his eyes as he walked back and forth and said:

"But if the moon does influence vegetation, if it exercises the greatest influence over the planting and growing, if it would make a difference of \$100 per year to every farmer to consult the moon, then what?"

"Why, it would be a good thing for the world at large to know," she replied.

"Exactly, and the man who proved it to the world would become famous and renowned, wouldn't he?"

"Certainly. But what has all this to do with your planting a dozen different things in one bed?"

"Just this: I am going to prove the truth or falsity of this moon business. If I prove it, I shall become Bowser the savant, and the world's friend. If I fail, only the two of us will know it, and the world will be no worse off."

"But how can you prove or disprove such a thing?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"By experiment, of course. To-night is a moonlight night. I shall take a seat beside those tomato plants and onion sprouts for an hour or two and observe what influence the moon has on them. I will continue the experiment for a week, and by

the end of that time I shall know one way or the other. I suppose you'll call it one of my fads, but I can't help that. Steam and electricity were fads once."

Mrs. Bowser sighed mournfully, but she realized that it was no use to raise objections.

Mr. Bowser decided to do his watching from 9 to 11 or later, and he carried out a chair and got notebook and pencil ready before the hour. When he finally passed out, he expected the cook, who had been watching proceedings, would say something, and she did. Tossing her head and giving her words a tinge of contempt, she said:

"I'll leave the back door open so you can plunge in at any time."

"But why should I want to plunge in?" he asked.

"Because there'll be a bust-up of some sort, of course."

He gave her a glare and passed on, and after walking twice around the newly made bed he sat down in the chair to watch any effect the brightly shining moon might have on his crops.

Mrs. Bowser was watching him from a back window, and after about five minutes she saw him make a note. It probably read:

"No particular effect as yet."

At intervals of ten minutes for the next hour he jotted down memoranda and was vigilant and solicitous.

Then she looked out after a little to find that the book and pencil had dropped from his hand and that he was leaning back against the fence and sound asleep. She saw no more.

A tom cat whose curiosity had been aroused showed up on the fence and then jumped softly down to investigate. He had scratched up about half the bed when he was joined by a second, and in quick succession came grimalkins Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6.

They rolled over and over in the fresh earth, they raked that bed fore and aft with their claws, they scratched and dug and devastated, and yet Mr. Bowser slept on.

It was an armed truce between the cats until the destruction was complete. Then they called each other horse thieves and liars and went in for a battle royal.

Of course, the fight had to begin right at Mr. Bowser's feet. The first mad grapple aroused him from his agricultural dreams, and as he sprang up he stepped on a bundle of cats as big as a barrel and pitched forward and rolled over.

There was a long minute in which Mrs. Bowser saw legs and arms and a bald head and five cats all mixed up and rolling over the grass, and then something struggled up with a whoop and dashed for the back door, with the cats in pursuit.

It was Mr. Bowser. He entered the kitchen

with a crash, closed the door behind him with a bang, and she got down from her room just as he tumbled up the basement stairs.

He was a licked man. He was an ex-savant. He was a played-out agriculturist and a busted experimenter. She estimated the number of scratches in sight at 350, and the cats hadn't been sparing of the bites.

"Well, the moon got in its influence, I see," she remarked as she wondered where she could find rags and sweet oil.

He looked around in a dazed way, but did not answer.

"Is it Savant Bowser or who?"

A scared expression came into his eyes, and he shuddered, and she led him up stairs to go into hospital for treatment.

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During the afternoon a load of lumber and a pig in a crate had been delivered in the Bowser back yard, and a carpenter called to say that he would be on hand in the morning to build a pen. Mrs. Bowser was, therefore, fully posted on affairs before Mr. Bowser came home to dinner. He entered the house expecting to get a blast at once, but to his great surprise Mrs. Bowser hadn't a word of reproach. He was considerably puzzled over her attitude, and there was a note of appre-

hension in his voice as he finished his meal and inquired:

"I suppose you've seen the pig?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "You are going to build a pen, and raise our own pork next winter?"

"Yes, that was my idea."

"I think it will be a good move. It will seem homelike to have a pig in a pen, and I know we waste enough to feed two or three of them. How much did that pig cost you?"

"T—Ten dollars!" he stammered. That was the exact figure. He had meant to say five, but the "ten" slipped out before he could catch it.

"Only ten?" she asked in surprise. "Why, you got a bargain in him. I had an idea you must have paid double that price."

"He cost ten, but he's a blooded pig, you know," continued Mr. Bowser as a wave of relief swept over his soul. "I could have picked up a scrub pig for two or three dollars, but scrubs are dear at any price."

"Yes, he looks to be a blooded pig, and his meat will be fine eating. The man sent a bill with the lumber. It is for \$14, and that strikes me as very reasonable. The carpenter won't charge over \$4 for building the pen, and you will have your pig all penned up for \$28. You have certainly got a bargain all around."

Mr. Bowser looked at her with eyes and mouth



wide open. He had expected to be told that he had paid at least twice too much, and to hear the hog denounced as the scrubbiest kind of scrub, and he couldn't make it out. At Mrs. Bowser's suggestion they went out to view the pig. The minute they appeared the beast began squealing in a way to set teeth on edge, and to bound against the bars of his cage like a hyena at feeding time. He was thin-bodied, razor-backed and wild-eyed, and Mrs. Bowser knew enough about pigs to know that this one would have been dear at \$2. Mr. Bowser expected indignant criticism, but in place of it she quietly observed:

"A little wild, I see, but that's a good evidence of blood. He'll calm down as soon as he gets used to his surroundings. He's probably hungry, too, and you'd better feed him."

Mr. Bowser ran into the kitchen for a dish of oatmeal, and as he returned and placed it before the pig the beast made a frantic dive for his hand and then set up such a squealing that he felt his hair curling. He looked from Mrs. Bowser to the pig and back, but she was placid.

"All blooded pigs are that way when first taken to a strange place," she said in explanation. "He'll probably quiet down as soon as we get him into a regular pen. If you'd only thought to buy a dozen hens, five or six geese and a calf, our back vard would be almost a farm."

They entered the house and left the pig to his meditations. He meditated and he squealed. He meditated and he shrieked, and after half an hour of it Mr. Bowser sprang up and exclaimed:

"By the great horn spoon, but I'll stand no more of that! I'll go out there and knock that blamed pig's head off!"

"You must let him alone," replied Mrs. Bowser. "He's been torn away from home and is among strangers, and of course he feels it. In a day or two he'll become wonted to the place."

Six different times between that and bedtime Mr. Bowser was determined to go out and pulverize that pig, and it was all Mrs. Bowser could do to restrain him. At 10 o'clock the noise began to die away. The pig had squealed until the squeal became a gurgle, and the frog in his throat served to deaden the sound. He was a pig who knew his gait. He let up when the hoarseness came and saved his voice for the next morning. He was shrieking again by sunrise, and his shrieks followed Mr. Bowser three long blocks as he started for the office after breakfast. He would have killed that pig before leaving home—he would have brained him with the ax—sawed him in twain—scalded him to death—but Mrs. Bowser was there to restrain him.

"He'll get over it in a day or two and be a comfort to us," she urged. "When you come home

to-night you'll find him as quiet and contented as a lamb."

The carpenter came and built the pen. As he banged and pounded the pig squealed in unison. The man would have had a good deal to say about that pig if Mrs. Bowser had given him the slightest encouragement, but she didn't. He was a man who had seen a pig or two, and he was cheerfully ready to say that the beast should be run into some dime museum and exhibited as a What-Is-It? At odd intervals, when no one was looking he punched and hammered the pig with a board, but no great satisfaction came of it. At about noon the hoarseness returned and the squeals ceased. The pig also fell down and seemed to sleep for a while. The pen was finished at 5 o'clock p. m., and Mrs. Bowser suggested that it would be a good idea for the carpenter to remove the pig to his new habitation. The carpenter would have been only too glad to oblige, but by the rules of his union he could not even handle a blooded pig after working hours without incurring a penalty. For this reason the beast was still in his cage when Mr. Bowser came home. He naturally asked how things had gone, and Mrs. Bowser explained:

"The pig is behaving better, but is still a little nervous. If you go quietly and kindly about it I think you'll get him into the pen without trouble.

By to-morrow he'll be grunting around in perfect contentment."

After dinner they went out to make the change. The pig's bristles were standing up and there was a glare in his eyes, but he was very quiet. His cage was moved up to the pen, the door opened, and he left it without urging.

"By George, but he's got over his nonsense!" jubilantly exclaimed Mr. Bowser. "I'll get some corn and—"

At that instant the pig made a running jump at Mr. Bowser's face and seized his hat. The hat was torn in pieces in five seconds. Then there came a shrill, long-drawn scream, another jump, and the beast was out of the pen. Mrs. Bowser ran for the kitchen door and made good her escape, but Mr. Bowser stood and stared and wondered. He didn't catch on till the escaped prisoner had made three circuits of the yard. Then he grabbed for a piece of board and shouted:

"I'll have his life for that! No blamed pig ever born can take the hat off my head in that fashion!"

Mr. Bowser rushed and the pig rushed. The board came down with an awful whack as they met, but didn't hit the pig. That young porker knew just what sort of a move to make. He dodged right and left and then made a straight lunge between his would-be murderer's feet, and Mr. Bowser went to grass with a momentum of 20,000



"THEN MADE A STRAIGHT LUNGE BETWEEN HIS WOULD-  
BE MURDERER'S FEET."



pounds to the square foot. Things of earth came back to him slowly and in a confused way. Blooded pigs, leghorn chickens, King George geese, back yards, Mrs. Bowser, kitchen girls and carpenters, were all mixed up for a while. Then he sat up and pulled grass and weeds and clothes pins out of his hair and inquired:

"Has—has anything happened?"

"Nothing of much account," answered Mrs. Bowser.

"But the—the pig?"

"He went over the alley fence long ago."

"And I—I—?"

"You've gone out of the pork-growing business. Don't you think you'd better come in and lie down and talk about the hens and geese we are to get to-morrow, or do you want to sit around in the pig-pen and meditate for a while?"

And without a word and humble as a cat, Mr. Bowser followed her into the house.

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There was a furtive smile of triumph on Mr. Bowser's face as he sat down to his cigar the other evening and at the same time took a dozen pages of type-written matter from his pocket and began to look them over. It was two or three minutes before Mrs. Bowser's womanly curiosity forced her to ask:



"Is that an article you have written for the newspapers?"

"Not exactly," he replied, as his smile deepened.

"Perhaps it's a poem?"

"Hardly."

"Is it a contract?"

"My dear woman," said Mr. Bowser, in his most fatherly way as he turned to her, "I've got a little surprise for you. I wasn't going to spring it for several days yet, but as your curiosity has been aroused and as I may need your assistance, I'll give the thing away now. You know, of course, that I belong to the Booth Dramatic and Literary Club?"

"Yes."

"Well we are to put on a play in about two weeks, and the proceeds are to go to the orphans."

"You don't say so!"

"Why don't I say so!" he demanded, as the smile chased itself around to the back of his neck all of a sudden. "Is there anything strange in the Booth Dramatic and Literary Club giving a play by amateurs?"

"But none of you are dramatic, or literary," she protested. "You simply play billiards and poker and drink cock-tails."

Mr. Bowser rose up and looked down upon her with a look meant to squeeze the life out of her body under a pressure of four hundred pounds to



the square inch. He fully intended to annihilate her then and there, but he suddenly remembered that he wanted her assistance, and so he contented himself with saying:

"Perhaps you are not to blame for your ignorance, but please don't be malicious. We are to put on a play. The title is: 'Why Mr. Dobbins Didn't Get Married.' It may please you or displease you to know that I have been cast for the part of Dobbins."

"Is it really so?" queried Mrs. Bowser, with a puzzled look on her face.

"It is really so. Here is my part. I just got it this afternoon. I also have the part of the Widow Winkle, and I want you to read it and give me the cues. We shall have a rehearsal in four or five days. I haven't the slightest egotism about me, as you well know, but I am ready to declare that I expect to make a great hit as Dobbins. I have been told over and over again that I should have chosen the stage for a profession."

"But you never said anything to me about it."

"No? Well, several things have happened which I never said anything to you about, and this is one of them. Will you read the part of the widow?"

"Why, Mr. Bowser!" she exclaimed, after glancing over his part, "how can you ever play this character of Dobbins? Dobbins is down as a little,

sawed-off man weighing about ninety pounds. That is to offset the widow, who is a large woman and weighs about two hundred."

"But I'm going to make up for the part, ain't I?" he queried with a note of alarm in his voice.

"Can you saw your legs off to play this part? And you see Mr. Dobbins makes his entrance through a dumb waiter. Just imagine your trying to squeeze yourself into a dumb waiter. And after he makes his entrance the widow picks him up and dandles him on her knee. You'd look nice being dandled!"

Mr. Bowser grew as white as a bleached snow drift, and there was a glint of pounded glass in his eyes, but he held on to himself and simply said:

"Go on, woman—go on."

"Well, in the first act the widow demands that you sing a song. She stands you up on a table and you sing. Mr. Bowser, even if you could turn yourself into a bandy-legged little man what about the singing? The house would either be convulsed with laughter or rise up and bombard you off the stage."

"I understand. Anything else?"

"Let me see. In the second act you are brought on to the stage in a band-box. You might possibly get one foot into the bandbox, but what about the rest of your body? The widow discovers

you and you are put into a cradle and rocked to sleep to the tune of 'Mary's Little Lamb.' I want to be there. I want to see you in that cradle."

"Have you finished with your insults?" hoarsely inquired Mr. Bowser, as every individual hair above his ears stood on end.

"Let me look. There seems to be another woman in the play and she wants to marry you. While you are seated at the table in a high chair and the Widow Winkle has gone out to get you some bread and butter and sugar on it, the villainess comes in through the woodshed and steals you and carries you off under her arm. Oh, Mr. Bowser, it would be too funny—to—"

For three minutes Mrs. Bowser laughed and cried by turns, but Mr. Bowser never made a gesture or opened his lips. He simply stared at her with a large and varied assortment of cold blooded murder in each eye. When she could control herself she took up the parts again and said:

"Haven't you noticed that after you have been stolen away the woman dresses you up as a girl to escape detection? You are supposed to be a dear, sweet little miss of twelve, who kneels down by her trundle bed every night and says: 'Now I lay me down to sleep.' I can see you in your night dress, with your hands clasped and a heavenly look on your face! You'll make a great hit, Mr. Bowser, and you'll have hundreds of offers to play the part

of 'Little Eva' afterwards. Well, let's get to work. I'll help you all I can."

"Woman!" gasped Mr. Bowser, after several efforts, during which his knees knocked together.

"Yes," gently replied Mrs. Bowser.

He wanted to go on, but he couldn't. There was a bone in his throat and sparks danced before his eyes. Apoplexy might have come in another minute but for Mrs. Bowser's action. She rose up and took him by the arm and led him to the lounge and aided him to stretch out. Then she put the camphor bottle to his nose and gently rubbed his forehead. In about ten minutes the threatened attack passed away, and he sat up with the intention of asserting his dignity and self-respect and humbling her to the dust.

"You have ridiculed me—you have insulted me!" he thickly exclaimed, but she seized the arm with which he was gesturing and pressed it down, patted him on the head in a wifely way, and as he sank back on the lounge and closed his eyes and groaned in despair she said:

"Poor Mr. Bowser! There is no doubt he was born for an actor, but the part of little Dobbins is not for him—not for him! Some other time, but not this time!"

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There was no doubt that Mr. Bowser had something on his mind. Dinner had been eaten, and

he had sat down to his cigar and the evening paper, but he was restless and uneasy. Mrs. Bowser mentally wondered whether he had bought an elephant at a bargain or found a new remedy for consumption, but said nothing. By and by he tossed the paper aside and observed:

"I haven't heard the piano going for the last three months. Anything out of order?"

"No, it's all right," she answered, "but as you hate music I don't play when you are here."

"I hate music! What are you talking about?"

"You have often compared my playing to the sounds of beating an old tin pan."

"Well, of course, you are a poor player, and your voiced is cracked; but so far as music is concerned—real music—it fills my soul with joy."

"But you never sing or play."

"Haven't had time heretofore, but now I—I—"

"You intend to."

"Yes. I feel the need of something to make home more pleasant—to offer more diversion during the evenings. I think I shall learn to play the violin."

"What! At your age!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowser.

"My age!" he shouted, as he bobbed around on his chair. "That's what I expected to hear. What's the matter with my age? I am neither blind, speechless nor crippled. Pliny went at it

and learned six languages after he was seventy years old."

"Well, I suppose you brought home the violin?"

"Yes. It's a beauty, and I got it cheap. It's a real Givoni, and I bought it of a man who was hard up. Got it for \$35, and it's worth \$200."

"And you will try to learn to play it?"

"Certainly. I had one lesson this afternoon, and in less than a month I'll astonish you."

"You will practice in the garret, I suppose?"

"Not by a jugful! I shall practice right here! That is, there won't be much practice about it, as I shall be playing tunes by Saturday. Let me show it to you."

He had left it in the hall as he came in. He got the package and uncovered it and brought back a greasy old fiddle which looked as if it had been carried around the country since the days of Columbus.

"This violin was made by Givoni himself over 100 years ago," he said, as Mrs. Bowser gazed at the old relic.

"Who was Givoni?"

"Who was Givoni? Why don't you ask who George Washington was?"

"Well, it's my opinion that you have been swindled on the instrument, and I fear you are too old to take up such music."

"Do you? That's a nice way to encourage a hus-

band! I see now why so many men run out nights. I not only saved \$165 in buying this fiddle, but I'll make your heart ache with jealousy before the month is over!"

He sat down and began to saw. He held his head on one side, run out his tongue, and sawed away at the scale, and he had been going about five minutes when the cook opened the door, beckoned Mrs. Bowser out, and whispered:

"I give you notice that I shall leave after dinner to-morrow!"

"Why, what is it?" was asked.

"Him—Mr. Bowser! He'll bring spooks and ghosts about! I have already been taken with palpitation of the heart. Mercy! but listen to those voices of the dead calling out to each other across their graves! Mrs. Bowser, it's the wonder of the people that you don't commit suicide!"

Mr. Bowser continued sawing away until his arm was tired and his collar wilted, but he wouldn't have quit when he did, had not a voice in front of the house shouted:

"Why don't some one throw a rock at the door or ring for the patrol wagon?"

Next day a dark-skinned man who said he was a grandson of the late Givoni, came up and gave Mr. Bowser a lesson, and the cook who had almost consented to stay on suddenly rose up and rushed



after her bundle. When ready to go she whispered to Mrs. Bowser:

"I'm sorry for you that's to be left behind, mum, but if he gets violent you'll have him taken to the asylum, of course!"

Mr. Bowser took four lessons in all and then told his teacher that his services would no longer be required. He took the last two lessons in the barn in order, as he said, to surprise the neighbors. On the evening of the last lesson he seated himself on a rustic chair in the back yard, and when ready to "perform" he said to Mrs. Bowser:

"You said I could not learn to play the violin at my age. Just listen and see if you don't change your opinion."

He started in with what was meant for a wild, weird prelude. It hadn't preluded over thirty seconds when a dozen people appeared at back windows. Fifteen seconds later, as Mr. Bowser got his tongue out and his arm limbered up, six different voices yelled at him.

"The applause begins," he said to Mrs. Bowser, as she stood at the window above.

"I'm afraid they don't like it," she replied.

"Don't like it!" he exclaimed, as he produced a wail of despair on the strings. "If we've got neighbors who can't appreciate music I like to know it right away and prepare to move. Don't tell me——"





AS HE AROSE TO BOW TO THE APPLAUSE A TOMATO HIT  
HIM IN THE EYE.



It was a big cucumber which whizzed by his ear. The cucumber was followed by a potato which grazed his shoulder. A lump of coal struck the fence behind him with a bang, and as he rose up to bow to the "applause" a tomato hit him in the mouth and Mrs. Bowser screamed for him to flee for his life. He was dazed for the moment, and it was not until a generous ear of green corn thumped him in the ribs and the half of a squash alighted on his shoulder that he got started for shelter. As he gained the house he had his revolver and six different murders in mind, but just then a policeman rang the door bell, and as soon as he was admitted he excitedly demanded:

"Now, then, who is it torturing cats in the back yard!"

"I—I was playing the violin," stammered Mr. Bowser in reply.

"Do you mean to tell me that those horrible sounds were made by a fiddle!"

"Y—Yes."

"Then you'd better stop it. If the neighbors start in to lynch you it'll be all over before I can get help!"

The officer departed just as three of the neighbors appeared. They invited Mr. Bowser out to the gate for a conference. What was said may never be revealed in print, but after ten minutes a decision was arrived at. When Mr. Bowser re-

entered the house he was looking as pale as a rag, and the first thing he did was to kick the fiddle sky-high, and the second to throw the pieces out of the back window.

"Mr. Bowser, have you gone crazy!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowser, as he threw the bow after the shattered fiddle.

"No, ma'am, I haven't, but I've got a few words to say to you!" he replied.

"What have I done?"

"Done! Done! Who coaxed me into buying a fiddle?"

"The grandson of Givoni. He had an old fiddle he wanted to get rid of, and he struck you for a flat and got twice its worth."

"Struck me for a flat!" shouted Mr. Bowser, as he walked around on the cat. "And why? Because I was willing to keep peace in the family. You had your mind set on a fiddle, and a fiddle you must have."

"Mr. Bowser! What did I want of a fiddle?"

"Heaven only knows. But for you I should never have thought of trying to play on it. What do you suppose Greene and Davis said?"

"That you were a dunce."

"That if their wives led them around by the nose as you do me they'd wipe the family out and then commit suicide! I must have looked sweet dawdling over that fiddle!"

"You did. I told you that it was nonsense your trying to learn music at your age."

"My age! There you go! Am I a thousand years old? Am I five hundred? Am I even one hundred, that you keep flinging it at me! Music! Why, I've more music in my big toe than you have in your whole body. Mrs. Bowser, this is the limit. You have gone far enough. Now beware! The worm is ready to turn!"

"But how did I have anything to do with it? Didn't I say all I could to discourage you? Didn't I——"

"Never! Never! But for you I should never have bought a fiddle and made a fool of myself! It was your little game, and you have played it well, but we will see what you gain by it. You can take the train for your mother's at 10:30 in the morning. Meanwhile—meanwhile——!"

And he glared at her, and nodded his head, and stalked into the library and banged the door and locked it behind him.

## CHAPTER II.

### HE TAKES UP TRANSMIGRATION.

Mr. Bowser had seemed absent minded at dinner, and for half an hour afterward he smoked his cigar in silence and had no interest in his evening paper. He finally aroused himself with a start and said:

"Mrs. Bowser, I want to talk with you on a very serious matter, and I trust I may have your serious attention. A man from Troy came into the office to-day and had a pug dog with him, and do you know I recognized in that dog an old and dear friend of mine who died years ago?"

"So you have got back to that nonsense, have you?" she replied. "It is only a few months ago that you were talking transmigration and got bitten by the cat and made the cook so mad she walked off next day. Why can't you let such subjects alone?"

"So you call the theory of transmigration nonsense?" he sharply inquired as he turned on her.

"Of course I do. At least, it is a theory so absurd that no sensible person will waste any time over it."

"Is it nothing to you, Mrs. Bowser, whether your soul passes into the body of a dove or a dog after death? If it isn't, it's something to me what becomes of mine. I don't hanker to be a hippopotamus. This theory of transmigration is gaining ground every day, and millions of people already believe in it."

"Well, if they want to believe in such rubbish let them go ahead."

"Rubbish! Rubbish! By what right do you call the belief of 30,000,000 people rubbish? There is either good foundation for this theory or else all these people are fools. How can you say what becomes of your soul after death?"

"How can you?" she queried.

"I can't exactly, and yet when I look into the face of a pug dog and behold the features of a dear old playmate, Tom Watkins—his eyes, his smile—it goes to convince me that there is a great deal more in this theory than I have hitherto accepted."

"I trust that your old friend was well and that you enjoyed his call," quietly observed Mrs. Bowser.

"Oh, you do! That's you all over! I never set out to talk with you on any matter of deep interest without your trying to belittle it. Woman, right here and now I boldly announce myself a transmigrationist, and if you have got any sense in your head I can prove the theory to you inside of an

hour! Yes, I can do it inside of a minute! Look at that cat!"

The family cat had just come in from the back yard and was sitting up with a look of innocence in her face. Mrs. Bowser regarded her for a few moments and then said:

"It's our old cat right enough."

"Yes, but whom does she remind you of? By thunder, but it's strange I never noticed the likeness before! Mrs. Bowser, as true as you live, the soul of your sister Hannah, who died three years ago, passed into that cat! Look at her, I say! If that isn't Hannah's expression to a dot, I'll eat my hat."

"You must be crazy! She looks like any other cat, and that's all there is to it. You can see to what silly things your theory leads."

"And you see no resemblance?" he asked.

"Of course not."

"Then it's because your obstinacy won't permit you to. Hannah's soul went into that cat as sure's you're born, and that's why she's hung around us the way she has. That's only one case, however. All human souls do not pass into animals, of course. Some of them pass into other people. When I die, my soul may pass into that of some babe who will grow up to be a celebrated poet or philosopher."



"Or a junk dealer or a knife grinder," added Mrs. Bowser.

He was about to resent the sneer when the cook came up and said there was a tramp at the basement door who wanted money and refused to go away.

"Perhaps it's some one into whom the soul of one of your old friends has passed, suggested Mrs. Bowser as Mr. Bowser started down stairs. "If it proves to be so, you will of course use him very tenderly."

He turned and glared at her and nodded his head in an ominous way, but she had given him an idea he meant to work on. At the door he found a burly big tramp who was a believer in "the rights of man" and who lost no time in saying:

"Why should I have to sleep on the grass under a tree while you occupy a hair mattress in a luxurious bedroom? I'm wanting a dime to put me up somewhere."

"And you shall have it," replied Mr. Bowser as he walked the man slowly down to the gate to be out of earshot of the house. "You have arrived at an opportune moment. You know what 'opportune' is, don't you?"

"If it's turning me over to a cop, don't you try it on," replied the tramp.

"Oh, you need have no fear! Have you ever heard of the theory of transmigration?"

"Never."

"Well, it's the idea that when a person dies, his soul passes into the body of some one else. Turn to the light and let me get a square look at you. Ah, yes! There is something in your face that reminds me of the past."

"No tricks, governor. I'm a bad man if you rile me."

"There will be no tricks. You strangely remind me of a boy named Joe Davis I used to know years ago. He died when he was 15. I am wondering—"

"If his soul passed into my body? What sort of a feller was he, governor?"

"A good boy. Yes, he was truly good and liberal-hearted."

"Free with his money?"

"He was."

"Then you needn't wonder any longer. I'm your old friend Joe. You've hit me off to a nail. I knew you the minute you came to the door. Shake hands, governor, and if you don't mind I'll take that dollar you borrowed of me just before I died."

"But I—I didn't borrow any dollar from you!" stammered Mr. Bowser, as he realized that his theory was growing on his hands. "Come to look at you again, I don't think you are my old playmate."



"I'M THE SOUL OF JOE DAVIS!"



"None of that, old man!" growled the tramp. "I'm the soul of Joe Davis, and I want that dollar. Come down!"

"I—I think there's some mistake. You are too old and your nose is too big, and your eyes—"

"No mistake, governor, and don't you try to bilk an old playmate. You borrowed that dollar from me to go to the circus, and I want it back."

Mr. Bowser started for the house, but the tramp seized him and gave him a shake that rattled his teeth. Then the conflict was on, and as Mrs. Bowser, the cook and the cat got outdoors there was a mix-up in the moonlight that ended with the tramp leaping the fence, and making off, and Mr. Bowser slowly getting up and glaring around and asking what had happened.

"Oh, nothing much!" replied Mrs. Bowser. "You just met the soul of an old playmate which had passed into the body of a tramp."

"And—and—"

"And the soul threw you down and rolled you on the grass till you'll smell of new mown hay for a month to come. Better come in and go to bed. The soul of some other dear friend may come along in the body of a policeman and tap you with a club and give you the collar."

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Mrs. Bowser had gone to her mother's in the country for a few days for a change of air, and

Mr. Bowser and the family cat had been left at home to run the house and look out for things. Before leaving she extracted a solemn promise from him that he would not disturb things while she was absent, but on the evening before she was expected home, and while he sat just outside the door in the back yard, a cigar in his mouth and the cat seated on another chair beside him, a sudden feeling of pity for Mrs. Bowser came over him. When she returned from her vacation she would have to go right to work at fall house-cleaning, and by the time she had finished, all the benefits of the country air would be dissipated.

"By George, but I'll go at it to-morrow morning!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he recalled that business was a little dull and he could spare a day or two from the office. "Yes, I'll pitch in right after breakfast and knock the socks off'n this house-cleaning business in less'n forty-eight hours. That little wife of mine shan't come home to break her back hunting the moths and dust out of this house."

There was a sound of gurgling and chuckling close at hand, and he turned to look at the cat. It was she, but she put on such an innocent expression that he laid the chuckling to a boy on the other side of the fence. He went to bed early to get a good start in the morning. He was alone

in the house, and as he slept he dreamed that a big cat sat on his breast and grinned into his face.

At 8 o'clock next morning he had coat, vest, collar and tie off and was ready for the fray. The first thing to be done, as he figured it, was to rush all the parlor furniture into the back yard and give him some room to spread himself. He had decided that the woodwork ought to be gone over with a light coat of paint, and after getting the furniture out he went looking around for old paint cans. He had painted the veranda and the flower-pots in the spring, and he found some of the mixture left. It was a tender pink, which would have looked too lovely for anything on the cheeks of a bride, but it needed thinning down. He knew that practical painters never used water, vinegar, cold tea or coffee to thin out paint, but his knowledge stopped short there. It was when his eye rested on the kerosene can that he solved the puzzle.

When the paint had been duly prepared for use, a little oil was added from the sewing machine can to give it a gloss, and Mr. Bowser went to work. It takes some men years to become an artist with the brush. It didn't take him over ten minutes. The peach brown color only stood out over the white groundwork, but the oil brought out a real bloom on the peaches. As he stood back and surveyed his first door he could almost imagine



that he saw rare ripe peaches hanging to trees out in the country. The odor wasn't exactly agreeable, but he decided to throw that in free gratis. It was a job that would have taken an average painter a full day, with his going back to the shop for putty, sandpaper and around the corner for beer, but at noon Mr. Bowser stood in the middle of the room and ran out his tongue and looked around and saw that his work was finished. In addition to the bloom on the peachblow color, the oil had brought out thousands of bubbles, but he did not regard them as drawbacks. On the contrary, he rather prided himself on having struck something new in the line of high art painting.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Bowser had complained of moths. Yes, he remembered that she had been fighting moths for years and that it had been hard work to keep them down. Whether she had used the ax, the crowbar or hot water he could not remember, but she had slaughtered them without pity and left their corpses unburied. Before he went out to a restaurant for his lunch he made a hunt for moths, and his search was ably seconded by the cat. It was the cat who finally found one burrowed in a dark corner, and Mr. Bowser's resolution was taken. The moths or the carpets or something must be exterminated. He didn't go to a drug store when he went out and ask for a remedy. Be-



lieving that a waiter in a restaurant ought to know all about moths he confided his troubles to the man and was answered:

"Yes, sir, I can tell you what to do. I've known all about moths ever since I was knee high to Tom Thumb. You want to sprinkle that carpet with a compound made of water, lime and kerosene. Make up about six gallons of it and don't be stingy about putting it on. The idea is to kill the moths all at once and have no long drawn out suffering around the house."

\* \* \*

Mr. Bowser got the ingredients and made a six-gallon crock full, and then, taking a flower sprinkler, he went over the carpet and started every moth on the fly out of the Tenth Ward. After the cat had walked across the carpet once she had started, and it was late in the afternoon before she returned with sore feet and a reproachful look. When the sprinkling had been finished and just as the back parlor was to be attacked, a tramp rang the doorbell and asked for something to eat. Mr. Bowser felt complacent and liberal-hearted. In place of food he gave the man a dime and then said:

"I don't claim to be a professional artist, but I've just finished a little job here I'd like you to look at. In traveling around you must see more or less artistic work."

"I do, sir," replied the tramp, as he followed him into the parlor and looked at the freshly painted woodwork. "This is what I calls a beauty, sir, a real beauty. You've used kerosene and oil with the paint, and the neighbors will all be jealous of you. You should have been an artist, sir."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in his tones, but Mr. Bowser added another dime and bowed him out. It was now noticed that the blue and red in the carpet began to look freckled, but there was no time to investigate. The furniture of the other room was rushed into the back yard, and the work of putting on the peachblow began.

\* \* \*

Mr. Bowser had been painting and admiring for an hour when he heard the dull rumble of thunder. His artistic soul was not disturbed by it, nor did he heed the rain which presently began to pour down and continued for two hours. When he had finished his painting, he made another mixture of moth killer and drenched the carpet of that room as well, and he chuckled with satisfaction as he imagined the mob of moths fleeing with terror, like the Boxers before the allied army. He had just got through and was contemplating his work with the satisfaction of a good husband when Mrs. Bowser arrived and walked in on him.

"Welcome home, my dear," he said, as he extended his painty arms.

She didn't rush into them. She looked at the bubbling peachblow woodwork, at the freckled carpets, out of the window at the upholstered furniture which had soaked for two hours in the back yard, and then she sat down on the floor and fell to weeping.

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"Well, a package came up for you this afternoon," said Mrs. Bowser, after dinner the other evening. "I suppose it's another fad of some sort?"

"When did you ever know of my running after fads?" demanded Mr. Bowser, as he turned on her.

"A hundred times. I'll wager it's something for your liver or kidneys, or lungs—something you bought of an Indian doctor on the street."

"Mrs. Bowser," said he, after a turn about the room, "you are probably aware of the fact that this is early spring?"

"Yes—very early."

"And that after the cold weather, heavy food, overheated rooms, etc., the human system requires toning up?"

"And you have something to tone?"

"I have. I have a feeling of lassitude. So have you. If allowed to run any length of time bilious fever would be the result—bilious fever, and perhaps death. The impending calamity must be averted. It can easily be done, and in this package is the means to do it. In three days we will feel

like new human beings. I am going to prepare a family tonic."

"But I don't want any of it," she firmly replied.

"Then you needn't take any. If you want to look like a walking saffron bag by the time the first birds come, I have no objections. As for me, I propose to take care of my health. I have here a lot of roots which I bought direct from a farmer. Roots make root beer, Mrs. Bowser, and root beer is the greatest tonic on earth. Every doctor—"

"But what do you know about roots?" interrupted Mrs. Bowser.

"Roots! You just show me a root I can't tell you the name of! I may not be much of a farmer, but when it comes down to roots I'm right on deck with any of 'em. That's what we want. Mrs. Bowser—a barrel of root beer—creamy, fizzy, delicious spring and summer tonic. That's what made Methuselah live to be 874 years old, and that's what'll keep us dancing from morn till night."

"I can't make it, and I know you can't, and I wish you'd give it up. There's a risk of being poisoned."

"But I can make root beer, and if you are afraid of it, don't touch it!" he vigorously replied. "I need a tonic, and propose to have one. As this is the cook's night out I'll slip into the kitchen and begin operations. Have we a large kettle around?"

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"I presume so," she said, as she looked over the contents of the package. "You seem to have several sorts of roots here?"

"Certainly. Root beer can't be made of one root, can it?"

"I don't think I ever saw any roots like these before. That looks like the root of a Canada thistle, and this one—"

"Mrs. Bowser, I am running this root beer business!" he interrupted, as he stood her aside. "I get the roots, make the beer and take all the chances of being poisoned. If you have any more sarcasm, go out and talk to the lamp post!"

It was a fixed idea in Mr. Bowser's mind that root beer was made from roots, but he wasn't quite sure of the next step. After getting down to the kitchen and thinking it over for a while he decided that the roots ought to be boiled, and he at once felt happier for it. There was a big kettle under the sink which the cook used occasionally on scrub days, and that was the very thing for the roots. He went to work to clean it out, and after laboring for five minutes he decided that what little rust was left clinging to the sides and bottom wouldn't do any particular hurt. In fact, it would probably give the beer the right sort of twang and help it to slip down the easier. He dumped the roots into the tub and soused them with cold water, but was careful not to get them too clean. When

all was ready he put them into the kettle, poured in four pails of water and started up the fire. The spring tonic was at last under way. He wanted to ask Mrs. Bowser how long it ought to boil, but as she had taken up a book and seemed to have no interest in his proceedings he determined to go it alone. After half an hour, however, and just as his stew had begun to boil, she came into the kitchen to ask:

"What are you going to put into the beer to make it work?"

"How work?"

"Why, it's got to ferment or it won't have any life to it. I believe they use yeast, but we haven't got any."

He suddenly remembered to have heard about yeast in connection with root beer, but, vexed at his own stupidity, he wouldn't give in.

"People who want yeast in their root beer can have it," he said, as he stirred up the fire anew. "I am making a root beer to please myself."

He had a dim idea that an hour's boiling ought to extract all the virtue from the roots, but not being sure of it he kept the fire going for two, and every time the mess in the kettle thickened up he poured in more water. At length he decided that the stuff was ready to ladle into the tub to cool, but the work wasn't half finished when Mr. Bowser made up his mind that it wasn't fit for a pig to



drink. He wasn't going to admit it to Mrs. Bowser, however, and he was sitting around and wondering how he could get out of it without loss of prestige when she reappeared and asked:

"Is the beer all right?"

"How could it be otherwise?" he replied.

"Well, I'm glad of it. I think you really need a spring tonic. When are you going to begin drinking it?"

"Right off now!" he said, as he rose up and entered the house for a cup and walked out to the tub.

The first swallow of the stuff almost lifted Mr. Bowser off the ground, but he knew that Mrs. Bowser was closely watching him and he made no sign. The second made his hair curl, but bracing his feet and trying hard to look pleased, he exclaimed:

"Ah! that goes right to the spot! That's the genuine stuff I've been aching for!"

"Good, is it?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

"Next thing to nectar! I've tasted forty different kinds of root beer, but this—"

"What is it?" she asked, as he humped himself up like a calf in a snow storm and bulged out his eyes.

"But this beats 'em all!" he finished with a great effort and sat down beside her. "In the morning I'll barrel it up and have my own nectar on tap."

Mr. Bowser lied about that. He meant to upset the tub and spill every drop before he went to bed and lay it to the cats, but he didn't propose to go back on his own root beer with Mrs. Bowser watching him; but then a sudden spasm seized him and he grew white and groaned:

"Say! I believe I've been poisoned by that infernal stuff!"

"No! Why, you said it was nectar!"

"Nectar be—hanged! I'm doubling up with pains in my stomach! Gee whizz! What shall I do?"

"Mr. Bowser, root beer never hurts anybody," she said, with her hand on his back. "Didn't you fall from a tree while out in the woods?"

"Fall! Tree! Woman, am I a fool? I tell you I'm a dead man! I must have steeped up some poisonous root with that confounded swill! There it comes again. Great Scot!"

Mrs. Bowser got him into the sitting room and on the lounge. A mustard plaster was laid across him, the camphor bottle was held to his nose, and she rubbed his feet and hands alternately and dosed him with brandy. She insisted that he must have had a sun-stroke or tumbled off the fence or over a log, and twice she offered to go out and bring him a quart of nectar if he felt thirsty. He simply groaned in reply, and now and then fetched a shiver which made his toes crack. It was midnight be-

fore the pain disappeared and he fell asleep, and Mrs. Bowser roused him up and got him to bed. Next morning he seemed to be all right, and as they sat down to breakfast she foolishly said:

"When I went out to look at your root beer this morning I found four dead cats lying around. Don't you think you made some mistake somewhere?"

"I do, madam!" he promptly replied. "You were opposed to my making it. You wanted to see me fail. When my back was turned you threw arsenic or strychnine or something into the kettle, and I just escaped death! This is the limit, Mrs. Bowser—the dead line. I will telephone to my lawyer to come over and arrange things, and tomorrow you can start for your mother's—for your mother's on the afternoon train!"

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For four long weeks Mr. Bowser had been talking of a day off and a trip to the seashore, but Mrs. Bowser had betrayed no interest. While she realized that the Atlantic ocean was a good deal bigger than Mr. Bowser, she also had every reason to believe that if things didn't go just right he'd pick a fuss and make things hot. She finally consented to the trip, however, and in due time they gazed upon the wet sands and the tumbling surf and sniffed the ozone.

"By George, but this does me good—does me

good!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser as he walked to and fro. "I feel as if I could swim a race with a shark and beat him by five lengths. Why in the name of goodness didn't we think to rig up and bring along a couple of bathing suits?"

"Because we don't want to bathe," she replied.

"But we do," he insisted. "It's ten years since I had a swim in the ocean, and I'm bound to try it. We can hire bathing suits, of course, and within half an hour I'll have you swimming like a frog. Hurry up and get ready."

There were about fifteen iron-plated reasons why Mrs. Bowser didn't want him to tackle the Atlantic, and she claimed to have a headache, a sore throat and a chilly feeling. She also said:

"If I were you I'd let it go. You always use sea salt at home, you know."

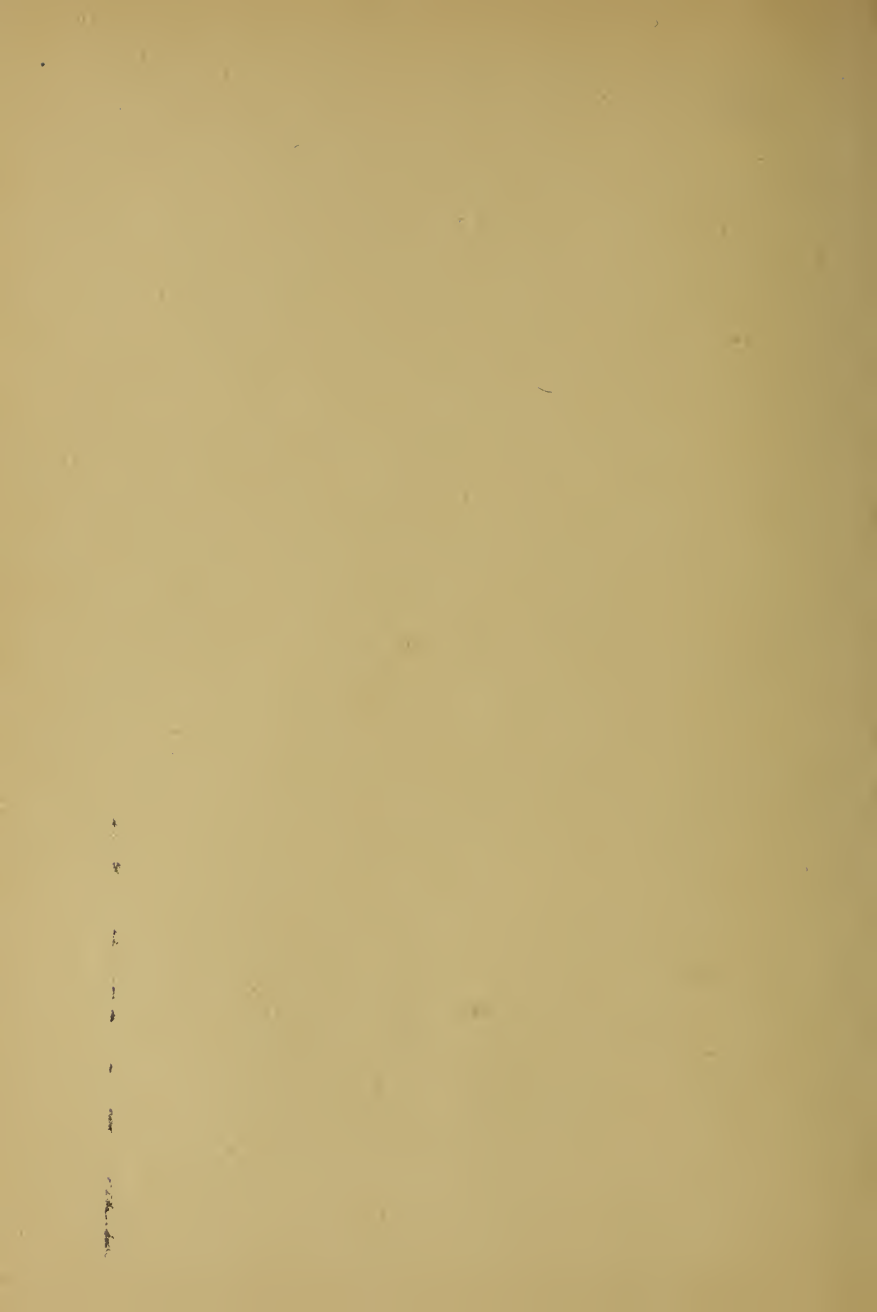
"But I want the swim—the exhilaration of the surf," he replied. "Lands! but half an hour in there ought to take five years off a man's life!"

It was no use for Mrs. Bowser to object. He was bound for salt water with foam on it, and as he started for a bathhouse to get a suit she began wondering how and where the row would break out.

Mr. Bowser's appearance in a bathing suit fifteen minutes later settled that question. At the bathhouse they had given a man weighing 180 pounds and as broad as a barn door a suit to fit a man



"WHO OWNS THE ELEPHANT?"



who could have crawled through a knot-hole. Mr. Bowser had used hydraulic pressure to get into that suit, and he had scarcely appeared on the beach when there were shouts of:

"Who owns that elephant?" "Behold, the father of all whales!" "Whoever heard of a rhinoceros taking a surf bath?" "Make way for the prize porpoise!"

Mr. Bowser heard the cries, but it never occurred to him that they were directed his way. He paraded up and down the beach with folded arms for a few minutes to get ready for his plunge, and then halted before Mrs. Bowser to say:

"This beats going a-blackberrying all to pieces, and you make a great mistake in not coming in. Don't get scared if you see me half a mile beyond the surf."

Two things happened as soon as Mr. Bowser was up to his knees in water. The water was cold, and as he found his teeth chattering and chills going up his back he paused to wonder why the ocean was not steam-heated. Three or four men took advantage of his hesitation to run against and knock him down, and as he kicked around he cut his foot on a clam-shell. He got up and coughed and wheezed and spluttered, and Mrs. Bowser's heart was in her mouth. She expected to see a fight, or that he would limp out in disgust, but to her astonishment he seemed to take both things as



part of the game. After getting his breath he headed for England and waded out four or five feet further and stood there for a moment like Ajax defying the lightning. The surf was rolling in good and strong, and he was "bows on" to it. He was preparing for a dive when a seventh wave came along and reached out for a solar plexus blow. A good many people were waiting and hoping for just what happened, and as Mr. Bowser was picked up and rolled over and over until stranded on the beach like a dead whale there was much laughter and applause. Mrs. Bowser hurried down to see if he was drowned. He wasn't. He had swallowed a barrel of water and been bumped about, but he was still in it. She was about to beg of him to cut the performance in two in the middle when she saw the red come into his face and his ears begin to twitch. He was getting mad, and she wisely walked away to let him go his own course. There were those around him in the water, however, who offered advice. They advised him to get off his legs; to swallow a bushel of sand for ballast; to root like a clam; to send his bay-window ashore; to hire a towing tug and to bring down a flying-machine next time he came. Mr. Bowser didn't murder any of the advisers. He didn't even cripple any of them for life. In due time he would be face to face with Mrs. Bowser again, and there would be a settlement to make



her heart ache. He couldn't swim a stroke, but others were disporting and he was expected to disport. By and by, when the friendly advisers had fallen away from him, he started out again. There was just one friendly adviser left. He was a mean-looking man, who had probably spent a year in jail for sheep-stealing and wanted revenge on somebody. What he advised was:

"See here, old haystack, you'd better sit on the sand and let the water play with your toes. If the undertow gets hold of you you'll be fish-bait in no time. You are built for a steam roller instead of a swimmer."

The man got away at once, and that meant another debit against Mrs. Bowser. It also meant that Mr. Bowser would force his way into the breakers and cut up all sorts of didos if he were drowned ten times over as the penalty. Straight into the tumble and foam he waded and began to splash, and even when he felt the water cutting the sand from under his feet and the undertow pulling at him he looked shorewards in contempt. If any such lop-shouldered, knee-sprung, one-horse man as Ajax could defy the lightning, he could——. But he couldn't. The first thing he knew he was drinking pailsful of water and gasping and gurgling and choking, and then he began to see sky-rockets and to hear ghosts calling to each other, and he seemed to tumble into bed and

go to sleep. But for the life-guard Mr. Bowser would have been drowned. They seized him by the ears and towed him in, and as he reached the beach other hands seized him by the neck and dragged him clear of the water.

Mrs. Bowser was wonderfully cool. At her suggestion the unconscious Mr. Bowser was stood on his head for a couple of minutes. Then a barrel was brought out and he was laid across it and rolled hither and yon. Then he was rolled around on the sand, his arms worked back and forth, and after a long twenty minutes there was a quiver of the eyelids, a gasping for breath, and a hoodlum bather yelled out:

“Hully-gee, but de old flounder is comin’ back to life and to show us some new tricks!”

Mr. Bowser was lugged off to a pavilion, and willing hands helped Mrs. Bowser to administer brandy, beer, whisky, sarsaparilla, soda-water, pop and ginger ale by turns. By and by he recovered his senses and his interest in life returned. It took him about five minutes to figure it out and then he looked around for Mrs. Bowser. She was there, and she bent over him to tenderly inquire:

“Well, dear, are you feeling much better?”

“Was—was it a tidal wave?” he whispered in reply.

“No. You have simply been disporting in the surf.”

"Ah! yes—I remember. Yes, you planned to have me drowned before your very eyes, and you coaxed me to go in bathing and you—you——"

The mean-looking man who had stolen sheep and been in jail and had called Mr. Bowser an old haystack was in the group around him. He raised his hand to cut the exclamations short, and kneeling down and patting the victim's bald head in a brotherly way, he said:

"Say, old kicker, you hain't got no case. If it hadn't been for your wife here you'd be rooting the bottom of the sea three miles out. After this, when you want to do the disporting act, you'd better put on a night-gown and jump into a pan of water!"

---

An hour before Mr. Bowser came up to dinner the other evening an express wagon left a package at the house, and Mrs. Bowser overhauled it to find that it was some sort of patent fire escape.

When he arrived he knew by the look on her face that she was ready to raise objections, and he wisely kept clear of the subject until dinner was over. Then he softly said:

"Mrs. Bowser, I happened to run across a good thing to-day and sent it home."

"Yes, I know," she replied. "It is the third or fourth fire escape you have invested in and found to be all nonsense. The last one gave you a fall

that kept you home for a week. If you want to break your neck, why not jump from the roof and have done with it?"

"My dear woman, will you listen to me? We are not sleeping over a volcano exactly, but any night in the year we may be aroused from sleep to find ourselves hemmed in by the fiery flames. In such an event we must leap from a window and meet death in another form."

"We should smell the smoke long before the flames got upstairs."

"We might and we might not. It is my duty, however, to take precautions. With a reliable fire escape in our room we need have no fear whatever. It is true that I have brought home escapes which did not work satisfactorily, but I have now found the right thing and shall proceed to put it up and test it. Even if you are tired of life and would be burned in your bed it is my duty to prevent it."

"Well, if you are determined to break your legs I cannot help it," sighed Mrs. Bowser.

"My dear, dear woman, there will be no broken legs," he blandly replied. "The thing is as simple as taking off your hat. I simply sit on a seat and lower myself down in absolute safety.

"It is bound to work. In case the serpent-like tongues of flame were darting about our bedroom I could lower us both to the ground inside of thirty seconds. The cook, being at the top of the

house, would naturally perish, but that is, of course, included in her wages. Can't you feel that it is your duty to encourage me in taking proper precautions?"

"It is only another of your fads, Mr. Bowser. It is a wonder that some one has not sold you a balloon before this. Go ahead, however. I'll get arnica and bandages ready and telephone the doctor that we shall have need of him directly."

Mr. Bowser continued to preserve his bland and quiet demeanor instead of shouting "Woman!" at her and jumping on his hat.

He picked up the bundle and asked her to step upstairs and see him adjust the escape, and when he had screwed a hook into the window casing he stood back and softly said:—

"There is the ne plus ultra, Mrs. Bowser. We will now imagine that we are buried in slumber at midnight. Before going to bed the cook poked half a bushel of live coals out on the kitchen floor and let them lie.

"After several hours they burst into flame, and a draft sends them swirling up the stairways and into our rooms. We awake to find ourselves in a fiery embrace. What do we do?"

"We walk down the back stairs," she replied.

"But we don't. The flames are pouring up front and back. You naturally utter a few shrieks, gallop around the room and then faint away.

"I do not lose my head. I am calm and cool. I remember that the most reliable fire escape thus far invented is attached to the window, and without undue haste I pick you up, place you on the seat and lower you to the ground. One minute later I stand beside you.

"Our home is speedily reduced to a blackened ruin, but we have been saved without a scratch. Have you any remarks to make, Mrs. Bowser?"

"Only that the police will lug you into the house with a broken back if you insist on fooling with that contrivance."

"There is where you make a mistake. I will now remove my coat and vest and prove the truth of all my assertions.

"You will observe that I raise the lower sash to its full height. Then I swing the seat out, so. The next move is to grasp this rope with both hands and prepare for the descent."

"Mr. Bowser, for heaven's sake, don't!" she exclaimed.

"There is nothing whatever to worry about, my dear woman," he smilingly replied. "I couldn't be safer in a rocking chair downstairs."

"But the ropes will break, or something will happen."

"The ropes will not break, and nothing will happen, except that I shall sink to the ground below

on the wings of a bird. Please note the performance. Here I go."

He went.

He pulled on the rope and lifted himself over the sill, and after swinging in the air for a few seconds he began lowering away.

The trick was neatly performed. He reached the ground without the slightest hitch, and a number of boys who had gathered on the sidewalk to witness the performance cheered him heartily.

After bowing his thanks he elevated himself to the window and swung in and said to the trembling and astonished Mrs. Bowser:—

"This is another of my fads, you know, and what do you think of it?"

"It—it doesn't seem possible!" she gasped.

"Neck all right, legs all right, no broken back. I will now make a descent accompanied by the cat."

Before the feline could get away or Mrs. Bowser interfere he had her on his lap and was lowering away, and this time there was a crowd of half a hundred people to cheer him.

As he stood smiling and bowing a policeman came forward and said:—

"Say, now, but you are a cool man and deserve lots of praise."

"Thanks."

"No danger of you or yours being burned with



the house. You are a man with a head on you, and your wife ought to feel proud and happy. Some men don't know a fire escape from a pound of sugar, but you are not one to be fooled. Boys, give the gentleman three cheers and a tiger."

Mr. Bowser took one of the gamins on his knees and ascended and descended half a dozen times to show how safe and easy it was, and before he got through there was a big crowd cheering and waving their hats.

When the performance finally closed, he stood before Mrs. Bowser with the same old bland smile and quietly remarked:—

"My dear woman, my name is Bowser."

She looked at him in silence.

"I indulge in fads and am a soft mark."

She had nothing to say.

"For instance, any old fakir with any old fire escape to sell can work it off on me, you know."

Mrs. Bowser sat down and began to cry, and in his triumph he so felt to pity her that he went softly downstairs without rubbing it in any further.

## CHAPTER III.

### HE DOES SOME WHITEWASHING.

There was nothing in Mr. Bowser's demeanor during dinner to lead Mrs. Bowser to suspect that he had any particular scheme on hand for the evening, but scarcely had they got seated in the family room when he cleared his throat and gravely observed:

"Mrs. Bowser, how many times do you suppose we have faced death within the last six months?"

"Why, what do you mean!" she exclaimed in alarm.

"I mean that we have been preserved about forty times over, and that miracles have been wrought in our favor. We are alive when we ought to have been dead. Every day and hour for the last half year we have stood face to face with the grim monster."

"I—I can't believe it!" she gasped.

"Perhaps not—not even when your husband says it, but it is the truth nevertheless. We have been in danger of typhoid fever, spinal meningitis,

consumption, paralysis and a dozen other fatal diseases, and all through our own carelessness. I can hardly conceive how we have escaped."

"But what is it—why don't you tell me?"

"When was our cellar whitewashed last?" he asked in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"Why, about a year ago, I guess."

"Our cellar was whitewashed for sanitary reasons. The idea was to kill germs and microbes. After six months whitewash loses its strength and germs and microbes will frisk over it and actually feed upon it. For six months, then, we have had no protection from the shafts of the fell destroyer. The malignant germs and microbes—"

"I'll get a colored man to-morrow," she interrupted, "though I don't think there is any danger. There are thousands of cellars which are never whitewashed."

"There will be no need of the services of a colored man, Mrs. Bowser. I don't propose to pay a man \$10 to come here and skim over the walls in an hour."

"But you—you don't mean that you will do it yourself?"

"That's exactly what I mean. I have a pail of whitewash and a brush at the back door. It will not only be healthful exercise, but inhaling the smell will do me good. I don't propose to leave a thousand microbes behind in some corner."

"Mr. Bowser, please leave this job to some one else," she pleaded in her tenderest tones. "If you go to daubing around with whitewash you'll get in trouble and lay it all to me. I'll hire a man tomorrow and see that it is well done."

"How'll I lay it to you!" sharply demanded Mr. Bowser.

"I—I don't know, but you will."

"That's all bosh! I never lay anything to you. I shall get into a suit of old clothes and proceed to whitewash. Nothing will happen, except that our lives will be rendered more safe for the next six months."

Mrs. Bowser groaned and turned away. Mr. Bowser would have begun that job even with both legs broken, and she knew that argument would be thrown away. In a quarter of an hour he was at work, and she got down the camphor bottle, a box of ointment and a strip of adhesive plaster and made ready for what might happen. Mr. Bowser felt elated as he sniffed at the whitewash. He thought he detected traces of a herd of microbes on the walls, and there was a grim satisfaction in his soul at the thought of swiping them out of existence. His heart being in his work he put on the dope with vigorous hand, and was just applying his third brushful when there was a sputter and a splatter and he dropped his brush with a whoop. He had got a dose of the mixture in his right eye.

With that optic squinted up until it raised the end of his nose, and the other blinking like a blind horse, he groped his way into the laundry and applied cold water. He hoped to get through with it without a call from Mrs. Bowser, but the smart was still lifting his heels off the floor when she came down and observed:

"Did you call me, Mr. Bowser?"

"No, I didn't call you, and you know I didn't!" he shouted in reply. "It's mighty funny that you have to poke your nose everywhere! When I want you I'll let you know."

"But didn't you whoop?"

"If I did that was my own business. I think I can whoop in my own cellar if I take a notion to. A microbe flew into my eye, and I'm getting it out."

She left him, and after a long ten minutes he got enough of the lime out of his eye to enable him to open it again. His bald crown and face had been thickly spattered, but he was not discouraged. He thought it would be a better plan to begin overhead and work gently until he had gotten the hang of the thing. He carried two old chairs out of the laundry and placed them in position, and standing on one and placing the pail on the other he went to work again. Confidence came to his heart as five minutes slipped away and no tragedy occurred. He had a smooth brick wall



BUT BOWSER WAS NOT DEAD.





to work at, and as he saw it begin to whiten under his brush he felt something of the pride of a born artist. In five minutes more he might have made himself believe that he was touching up a landscape in the Adirondacks had he not made a long reach with his brush to overtake a bug which was headed for safety. The rickety chair on which he was standing made that an excuse for wobbling about and breaking down, and when Mr. Bowser fell it was of course eminently proper to take the other chair with him. It was more than a whoop this time. It was a yell which lifted Mrs. Bowser out of her chair and made the cook knock the nose off a pitcher, and the crash which followed made the sashes rattle. When Mrs. Bowser got down cellar she found a pail of whitewash, two broken chairs and a whitewash brush and Mr. Bowser all mixed up on the cement floor, but Mr. Bowser was not dead. The contents of the pail had soaked him from head to foot, and having struck the back of his head on the hard floor he was dazed and flighty. With the assistance of the cook he was pulled to the wall and propped up, and a few sniffs of the camphor brought him out of the fog. Then Mrs. Bowser tenderly inquired: "How did it happen, dear? Did the microbes suddenly attack you?"

A long minute went by before Mr. Bowser could get out a word. Then he slowly replied:

"Woman, I understand! You sneaked down here and kicked the chair from under me, but I am still alive!"

"Don't talk nonsense! Are you hurt?"

"You can go, woman! Go and plot and plan another attempt at murder!"

"But let me—"

"And to-morrow we will end this. Fifteen attempts to murder me in one year, and now the end has come!"

"Mr. Bowser, I—"

But he gestured with his right hand and with his left, and kicked out with his legs, and Mrs. Bowser and the cook withdrew and left him alone with the frisky germs and microbes and fell diseases.

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"Did it ever occur to you what a handy man I am around the house?" suddenly asked Bowser, as he looked up from his paper the other evening.

Mrs. Bowser looked at him in an anxious, doubtful way and made no reply, realizing that he had a scheme of some sort on hand.

"I was figuring up to-day," he continued, "and I make out that I can save about \$500 a year by doing my own repairing. I call that pretty good, don't you?"

"But we have nothing to repair just now," protested Mrs. Bowser.

"Not over \$50 worth, and I can do it all in two hours. I like the work, and the exercise does me good. The first thing is to mend this rocking chair. One of the rockers is loose, and unless attended to in time the whole chair will go. It will take me about five minutes to fix it."

"I wish you wouldn't. I left an order to-day for the upholsterer to come up."

"And he'll knock the chair to pieces, glue it together again and charge you from \$10 to \$15. I know 'em. They are always looking for such jobs, but they get none here. I can fix the chair for two cents."

"But you—you always get mad and break things and have a row," said Mrs. Bowser.

"Never! Never got mad or broke anything in my life. In your extravagance you'd be willing to pay out \$10 for two cents' worth of repairs. I wouldn't. I believe in economy. I shall get out my tools and fix the chair. If you don't like to assist me you can go up stairs."

Mrs. Bowser disappeared up stairs without another word. She knew that if she got up an argument Mr. Bowser would keep up his repairs until every piece of furniture in the house had been gone over. As soon as she had gone he got out his tool box and glue pot from a basement closet and stripped off his coat and vest for work. When he had looked the chair over he decided that the rock-

er must come off and be put on anew. It took him fifteen minutes to loosen it, and by that time his glue was ready to use. It's the easiest kind of a job to put on a rocker. All that is needed is plenty of glue and two wooden pegs. The job was finished in ten minutes, and then Mr. Bowser hunted for something more. After a long search he discovered that one of the doors of the book case "sagged." He was glad to see it. With the aid of a screw-driver he removed both doors and changed them about. He had just finished his work when Mrs. Bowser came down to see how he was getting on.

"What have you done to the doors?" she queried as she stood looking at them.

"Simply transposed them," he smilingly replied. "It is a law of mechanics that when one of a pair of double doors sags you have only to transpose them. You now observe——"

"That they can't be closed at all!" finished Mrs. Bowser as she tried to work them.

Not only would they not close, but they were wrong-end up. Mr. Bowser realized it, but having made the mistake he was bound to stick to it. He was asserting that the doors must have a little time to shrink when Mrs. Bowser went over and picked up the rocking chair and began to laugh. Mr. Bowser had replaced the rocker wrong-end to.

"You see what you've done?" she remarked, as she pointed to the rocker.

"I see that I have saved at least \$5 by repairing that chair," he blusteringly replied.

"But look at that rocker! How can the chair be used as it is?"

"That rocker it all right and just as I intended it. I'm running this business, and I'd be much obliged if you wouldn't interfere. The chair is all right."

"But it won't rock!"

"Why not? See if it won't."

"Mr. Bowser whirled the chair around and fell into it and started to rock. One rocker wanted to go forward and the other backward, and as a result he pitched forward on the floor with a crash that jarred the house. Mrs. Bowser started to help him to his feet, but he waved her away and struggled up. For half a minute he stood before her unable to speak. Then he hoarsely exclaimed:

"Woman, go to your room before I do something desperate!"

"But what have I done?" she asked. "You couldn't expect to rock in a chair with——"

"Will you go!" he shouted as he pointed at the door.

She went, and Mr. Bowser sat down on the lounge to recover himself. For the first five minutes he was ready to admit that he had blundered

about the rocker and the book case doors. Then he determined never to admit it as long as life was left in his body. Those doors should hang that way, and that chair should be left as it was forever and forever, or at least until Mrs. Bowser begged his forgiveness. Then he felt better and decided to do some more repairing. It was the cook's night out, and he descended to the kitchen to look around. He faintly remembered that something had been said a week or two before about a water pipe which had broken from its fastening to the wall. He soon found it. A couple of screws had worked loose and the pipe had bent down.

"A plumber would come up here and fool around for two days," mused Mr. Bowser, "and I'd get a bill for about \$7 on a job which won't take me over three minutes."

There could be no blunder on that job. That water pipe couldn't be turned end-for-end or taken out doors or down cellar. It was simply to lift it up and replace the screws in their original holes. On hands and knees Mr. Bowser crawled under the sink and got a firm hold of the pipe and heaved on it. He had heard of a lead pipe cinch, but had never had one before. A plumber would have coddled that pipe and used it gently, but Mr. Bowser had no soft solder in mind. There was a heave and a burst, and a gallon of water, having a pressure of fourteen pounds to the cubic inch, struck

him full in the face. He hadn't uttered but one yell, when the second gallon followed suit, and as he rolled out from under the sink water followed him by the barrel. His heave on that pipe had broken it. The water didn't come out in one single jet, but in half a dozen, and for a time each and every one of them hit Mr. Bowser. He was like a drowned rat before he could get away, and the kitchen floor was inches deep with water. Mrs. Bowser heard that whoop he uttered when the first gallon struck him, and she came running down stairs just as Mr. Bowser disappeared out of the front door. There was a plumber shop two blocks away, and he was headed for it. He left a wake of wetness as he ran, and pedestrians yelled at him and policemen tried to stop him, but he got there to find the place locked up. He ran to another and another with the same result, and it was not until a policeman got him by the neck that any explanations were made. Then a messenger was sent to the water office, and at a late hour the water was shut off. Meanwhile it was flooding the Bowser basement and cellar with the utmost liberality, and a crowd of two hundred people assembled in front of the house to learn particulars. It was midnight when all was over. Then came Mr. Bowser's opportunity. He stood before Mrs. Bowser in all his wetness and began:

"Five hundred dollars' damages and three hours



of uproar, and you are to blame for it! Woman, this is the end. Your conspiracy——”

But Mrs. Bowser advanced and took him by the arms and turned him around and pointed up the stairs. He hung for a moment and then began to climb, and while she and the cook worked at the flooded kitchen he slept like a lamb.

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As the Bowsers finished dinner the other evening an expressman drove up and announced a package, and while he was bringing in a strange object Mrs. Bowser was wondering to herself whether it was the model of a man-of-war, a baby carriage or some new patent contrivance to throw the cats off the back fence by pressing a button in the family bedroom. She asked no questions, however, and Mr. Bowser vouchsafed no explanation until he had lugged the package into the sitting-room and removed the wrappings. Then he said:

“I’ve been keeping my eye out for something like this for the last five years, but just struck it to-day. Got a bargain, too. It’s worth double what I paid for it.”

“Is it a new sort of moth-proof chest?” asked Mrs. Bowser as she bent over it.

“No, ma’am, it isn’t. Neither is it a wheelbarrow or a rat-trap. At some period or other in your life you may have heard that we had a row with the British in 1776. Numbers of the present States



were Colonies then. The inhabitants were called Colonists. They had clocks. This is one of them."

"But we have four clocks in the house," she protested.

"Suppose we had forty? I bought this clock for its antiquity—for the sentiment connected with it. We could duplicate one of the Pyramids of Egypt in our back yard, but there would be no sentiment about it. I got this clock for \$50, and I can sell it any minute for \$100. It was owned by John Hancock himself, as you can see by the initials 'J. H.' scratched on the case. For twenty years he would permit no hand but his own to wind it."

"And you paid \$50 for that old feed-box!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowser as she fell back.

Mr. Bowser jumped a foot high and turned white as snow, but he hung on to himself and replied:

"Not another word! Don't ever dare look at it again! I bought this clock to please myself, and it's nothing to me whether you like it or not."

Mrs. Bowser sat down to the newspaper, and Mr. Bowser removed his coat and vest and got out his tool box. The seller of the clock had been honest enough to say that it needed cleaning before it would tick-tack off the correct time, and that was one of the reasons which induced Mr. Bowser to buy it. He knew that he would thoroughly enjoy tinkering away at an old clock. He laid the cords and weights aside, got the case upon a table, and by use

of the screw-driver he soon had the interior works under his eyes. There was no doubt it needed cleaning. He discovered portions of a Colonial bed-quilt stuffed among the wheels, and the mice had made use of yarn and cotton and paper to construct nests in the corners. When the ruins and fragments had been removed and a liberal dose of oil supplied to all parts the old clock suddenly began striking. The first few strokes brought a smile to Mr. Bowser's face, and he was almost ready to say to Mrs. Bowser that it was the chime of the Bell of Liberty ringing out freedom for a nation. As she seemed indifferent, however, he choked back the words. The clock struck 300 times, and was still whanging away when he up-ended it against the wall and attached the weights and pendulum. The striking went right along just the same, and as Mr. Bowser stepped back and scratched his head and run out his tongue and puzzled over it, Mrs. Bowser quietly arose and went up stairs.

"Every stroke reminds me of a brave deed or a noble sacrifice," muttered Mr. Bowser as he reached out for one of the weights, "but I don't want too much of it all at once. I think she'll stop after——"

But she didn't. He lifted up the weight to "ease her off," and in so doing unhooked it, and down it came with a smash on his foot. He ut-

tered an awful yell and staggered backward over a chair, and if Mrs. Bowser hadn't called that clock a feed-box he would have continued his racket till she came down. She was down on that clock, and after one long, loud yell he bit it off short. She had been alarmed, however, and, leaning over the banister, she demanded:

"Mr. Bowser, is any one trying to murder you down there?"

"It was the cats in the back yard!" he replied as he sat up and caressed his foot and swore under his breath.

It was ten minutes before he could stand up, and not for an instant did the clock cease to strike. He finally managed to get the other weight off and the pendulum unhooked, but there was a continued r-r-r-r-r, which set his teeth on edge. He grabbed the old clock and shook it from side to side, but all the wheels started to buzzing in chorus.

"Durn my hide, but what ails the old thing, anyhow!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he sat down to wipe his brow. "There's the initials 'J. H.' as plain as the nose on my face, and John Hancock used to wind these weights up with his own——"

There was a sudden cessation of the strange noises, but after the lapse of ten seconds, and just as a smile was working up on Mr. Bowser's face, the striking recommenced with new vigor, and

there was added a wail like that given forth by a planing-mill.

"Mr. Bowser, have you got a dog-fight down there?" called Mrs. Bowser.

"You attend to your business and I will to mine!" he replied, and he advanced to the clock and gave it a thump with his fist. The noise continued just the same, nor did it cease when he banged it still harder. Had the Colonial clock been as well acquainted with Mr. Bowser as Mrs. Bowser was it would have made ready for a calamity. His ears and the back of his neck began to get red and his chin to quiver, and Mrs. Bowser knew that the end was near when she heard him utter:

"You bet your life I don't stand no such nonsense from any clock ever made by mortal hands! You'll stop that noise or come down with a bang!"

He gave it two minutes longer to stop. It kept right on. Then he seized the old relic with both hands, gave it a wrench and a twist, and it was brought to the floor face downwards. But even then there was no let-up. While the bell continued to strike for Liberty, there was a grinding and groaning of wheels which might have been meant as a requiem for John Hancock.

"Mr. Bowser, have you got a fit?" demanded Mrs. Bowser from the head of the stairs.

He did not answer her. Drawing a long breath and forgetting all about his smashed foot he leaped



"HE LEAPED HIGH INTO THE AIR AND CAME DOWN  
UPON THE PATRIOT OF '76."



high in the air and came down upon that patriot of '76. There was a smash and a crash, with wheels and springs and splinters flying around the room, and then came silence. Five minutes later Mr. Bowser came toiling up stairs, and Mrs. Bowser kindly remarked:

"I've been thinking about those Colonial clocks, and I think your idea of getting one——"

"Woman, are you speaking to me?" he shouted at her.

"Why, yes. I was saying that it was a good idea to pick up that clock for——"

"What clock?"

"Why, the one you have down stairs—the one John Hancock used to own."

"There is no old clock down stairs. I am not picking up Colonial clocks. I don't know anything about John Hancock and don't want to. As I'm not feeling well this evening I'm going to bed early, and you'll oblige me very much if you'll keep your chin still for the next fifteen minutes!"

"But did you—you——?"

But he glared at her until she felt her blood run cold and then limped off to his own room to doctor up his foot and larrup the memory of John Hancock.

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Mr. Bowser had about half finished his cigar and his evening newspaper when Mrs. Bowser looked up from her sewing and said:



"I wish you'd stop at some furniture store in the morning and see if you can't get a man for an hour or two. I want the things moved out of the spare bedroom and the carpet taken up."

"That's a fair specimen of your economical way of doing things," answered Mr. Bowser. "There's about ten minutes' work to be done and yet you'd pay a man \$10 or \$12 instead of asking me."

"You ought to get a man for \$1, and the last time you took down a bedstead you——"

"The idea of paying out enough money to buy two tons of coal for ten minutes' work!" he interrupted. "When I sit down and think over your reckless extravagance I wonder that we have a dollar in the bank. What is it to take down a bedstead, to yank a bureau out into the hall, to rip up a carpet? I'll have the room empty in five minutes."

"But I thought I'd have the bureau brought down stairs."

"Well, that may take two minutes longer."

"And you know the bedstead is big and solid, and once when you started to take it down you——"

"I know nothing about it. If I ever start in to take it down, then down it comes. I don't propose to pay out my hard-earned money for somebody to come up here and loaf around. It is now exactly seven o'clock. In five minutes the room

will be empty, and one minute later I will be back here again."

"I'll pay a man out of my own pin money," protested Mrs. Bowser.

"You'll pay nothing," he replied as he started up stairs, followed by the family cat.

No preparations had been made for removal. Mr. Bowser entered the bedroom to find the bed undisturbed, but with one wide sweep of his arm he gathered up blankets, sheets and pillows and carried them down the hall. Then he returned and gave the mattress a twist and a whirl which flopped it off the bed and out of the door, and the springs came next. Mr. Bowser was working on ragtime. No man can pick up a set of bedsprings to the time of "Yankee Doodle." The cat saw the impending calamity and leaped to the top of the bureau. As Mr. Bowser heaved up the springs and gave them a bounce he lost his balance and went down with a crash, and, having nowhere else to go, the springs followed him. He was fighting them off with hands and feet when Mrs. Bowser looked in at the door and exclaimed:

"Thank heaven that the life has not been crushed out of you!"

"Crushed be hanged!" he yelled as he got rid of the springs and stood up. "If you imagine I'm the sort of man to be crushed under a blamed old set of bed springs you don't know me!"

"I knew you'd have trouble, and that was the reason I wanted you——"

"There's no trouble about it. The durned cat tripped me up. I'm big enough and old enough to boss this job, and you get right back down stairs and attend to your knitting."

There are two ways of taking down a mahogany bedstead weighing a ton or two. Mr. Bowser's way was peculiarly his own. His first move was to grab the footboard and wrench and twist and draw the whole bed across the room and push it back again. Then he stood off and kicked at the rails until the heels flew off his slippers. It was a sudden inspiration which caused him to lift up the ends of the rails, and to his great surprise they were loosened from the head and footboards. The footboard he managed to move down the hall without accident, but when he came to the headboard, which had been brought over in the *Mayflower* to ballast the ship, he realized that a desperate struggle was at hand. So did the cat, and in her wisdom she retreated to the hall to await events.

"Why in thunder my great grandfather didn't use this lumber to build a horse barn is more'n I can make out!" growled Mr. Bowser as he surveyed the massive structure and waited for his second wind.

It had to be moved, however, and there was no time to call up the Coast Wrecking Company or

figure on the hydraulic power. Mrs. Bowser crept up and sat on the stairs and shivered, and the cat walked to and fro in the hall and had nervous tremors, while Mr. Bowser moistened his hands and looked furtively about for a point of vantage. Suddenly he jumped forward and made an attack. His object was to take the bedstead by surprise and run it down the hall before it could make a move in defense. He succeeded to a degree—that is, he got the cumbersome mass clear of the wall and on the move for the door, and Mrs. Bowser was beginning to breathe easier and the cat feeling more hopeful when there was a yell of terror and a crash which shook things clear down to the cellar bottom. The headboard had bucked. Mr. Bowser thought the whole east side of New York was leaning over him for a moment, and the jump he made as he yelled out ought to be preserved in the history of athletics. He struck his head against the wall with a bump which made him see stars, but he had saved his life.

“I knew it,” said Mrs. Bowser, as she looked into the room and saw the headboard flat on the floor and Mr. Bowser wiping the dampness off his bald head.

“Has anybody asked for your opinion?” he replied as he tried to assume a careless air.

“I thought you were surely killed. I hope you

will now let the rest of it go and send up a man. You see, you don't know how——"

"Oh, I don't, eh? But I'll show you that I do. I'll clear this furniture out if I break both legs and drive my head through the wall."

Mrs. Bowser went back to her seat on the stairs, and after lifting her eyes in appeal the cat got as far down the hall as she could. It was Mr. Bowser's plan to lull the headboard into a feeling of security by giving it a brief rest while he tackled the bureau. To get the bureau out he must move it over the headboard. He had no statistics at hand to consult, but he had great confidence in his lifting powers. Mrs. Bowser heard him suddenly rush upon that bureau and haul it away from the wall. Then she heard him gasping and grunting as he lifted at the corners. She followed him with her ears as he walked around behind it and put his shoulder to the wheel and got a brace for his feet. There was a louder grunt, a muttered, "Git up there, durn you!" and then the house was shaken again. Mr. Bowser had heaved up, and the bureau had heaved down, and the loss of his toe-hold at a critical moment had given the bureau the victory. He lay there under it, and he seemed to be dead. The cook was summoned through the speaking tube, and by their united exertions the two women lifted the bureau and rolled the unconscious form of Mr. Bowser aside. It wasn't a case

of death. He had simply been squeezed as flat as a pancake and had his bones twisted about. Mrs. Bowser had scarcely taken his head in her lap and moistened his nose with camphor when he opened his eyes and sat up.

"Who—who pushed the blamed old bureau over on me?" he demanded as soon as he could get his breath.

"Why, no one, of course," answered Mrs. Bowser. "You were trying to heave it up, you know, when——"

"When you sneaked into the room and jammed against it and hoped I would be squeezed to death! I might have known you would do it. Woman, although you have been foiled again, this is the end. You have tried assassination once too often."

"But how can you say——"

"That will do. It's as plain as day. I'll now drag my limping, bloody body to the library and prepare the papers, and to-morrow our respective lawyers can arrange about the divorce and alimony. Not a word—not a single word. I see through it all, and, baffled murderess, I wish you good night and pleasant dreams!"

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Mr. Bowser was apparently reading his newspaper, and Mrs. Bowser was sewing, when all of a sudden he burst out laughing and slapped his leg.

She looked up in an inquiring way, and he explained:

"It's a wonderful thing—positively wonderful, and I'm convinced at last."

"What is it you find so wonderful?" she asked.

"I'll tell you and I hope you won't jump on me about fads. You've read and heard of what they call mental telegraphy, I presume? Well, I've been experimenting on you for the last half hour, and the results are really wonderful. When you first sat down I mentally telegraphed you to cross your feet. You did so. Then I telegraphed you to look up at the clock. You did so. Then I ordered you to scratch your nose, yawn and rock back and forth, and you obeyed."

"What nonsense!" replied Mrs. Bowser.

"There's no nonsense about it. It is an idea as old as the world. Why shouldn't one person's thoughts fly through space and be communicated to another? What did you do at exactly three o'clock this afternoon?"

"I went out to order meat for dinner," she answered, after a moment's thought.

"Exactly—ha! ha! ha! At three o'clock I telegraphed you to go out after meat and you went. Don't talk about fads. It is positively wonderful, and if you would only go in with me we would develop it to an astonishing degree. There you go;



I just telegraphed you to raise your left hand and you lifted it to scratch your ear!"

"Is it possible that you really believe in such twaddle?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"Twaddle! That's it, of course! Anything you can't make out is twaddle. Of course I believe in it, as do millions of others, and it won't take me half an hour to convince you. I don't know how it will work on animals, but I'm going to experiment. There's the cat under the piano. I will telegraph her to come here. Just watch me. I lean forward and fix my eyes upon hers. I say to her: 'Come here—come here.' She gets nervous. She moves. She comes. She——"

The cat yowled and spat and made a sudden rush over Mr. Bowser's feet and disappeared down the hall and up stairs.

"It—it wasn't exactly a success," he admitted after the flurry was over, "but that's easily explained. A cat hasn't a soul. She felt my mental influence to an extent, but couldn't make out what I wanted."

"Haven't you got a corn on your right foot?" queried Mrs. Bowser, as she took up her needle again.

"What if I have?" he asked.

"You'd better get down your old razor and shave it off, instead of wasting your evening."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I've set out to

make some experiments in mental telegraphy, and I'm going to do it if a million corns are waiting to be shaved. I needn't expect any help from you, of course, but I don't want it. I will now telegraph to Jones to run in here. At the office to-day we understood each other perfectly."

Mr. Bowser closed his eyes, contracted his thoughts, and a mental dispatch was sent to Jones, next door. There was silence for three minutes and then the door bell rang.

"Ah! you don't believe, eh?" he exclaimed, as he rose up to answer it. "I think you'll call this something besides 'twaddle' before the evening is over."

The door was opened, but it didn't happen to be Jones who stood there. It was a man who explained that he had lost his all in the great Chicago fire and had never recovered from the blow, and if Mr. Bowser could spare him ten cents——

The door closed and bit the conversation in two.

"Why didn't Jones come in?" asked Mrs. Bowser as Mr. Bowser returned to the family room looking like a man who had struck an icy corner.

"That's easily explained. That confounded old tramp interrupted the message. He was probably standing on Jones' door step at the moment, and the dispatch couldn't pass through him."

"You ought to have sent a corkscrew dispatch, so it could have twisted around him!"

As Mr. Bowser glared at her he felt his heels lifting up and his ears working, but by a powerful effort he restrained himself, and after a minute or two he said:

"I will now experiment on the cook. I will telegraph her to come up to the head of the stairs and ask you whether we will have oat meal or pancakes for breakfast."

He sat down with his head in his hands and there was silence for thirty seconds. Then there came a crash and a yell from the basement. Both ran down to find that the cook had shoved her elbow through a pane of glass while pulling down the window.

"Were you about to come up stairs?" asked Mr. Bowser, as she made her explanation.

"I was, sir," she replied.

"To ask Mrs. Bowser about breakfast?"

"No, sir. I was going to hand you the gas bill which was left here this afternoon!"

"You see what nonsense it all is," said Mrs. Bowser, as they went up stairs.

"I see nothing of the kind," he sharply replied. "The trouble is that you are antagonistic. I'll get along without you, however. I wonder where that blamed cat is?"

"You'd better let the cat alone. If you sit and glare at her again she may go mad. Better try Jones again."

"That's sarcasm, of course," he said, as he gritted his teeth and glared at her, "but I'll fetch Jones over here dead or alive. You sniff and scoff at this thing, but that only shows your ignorance. Go out among your neighbors and talk as you do to me and they'll put you down for an idiot. Why, woman, the theory of mental telegraphy is older than the hills. It was known 3,000 years B. C."

"But there's nothing in it," she persisted.

"But there is and I'll prove it. Now you sit down and be passive and I'll try it on Jones again. Don't antagonize me in your mind, but give me a fair show. Now I have my thoughts on Jones. He is sitting on the lounge. He begins to hitch around. Now my message is becoming communicated. He says to his wife that he is going to drop in here for a game of checkers. Now he is at the hall tree. Now he is out on the step. Now he is at our gate. Now he rings the bell."

At that instant the bell rang, and it was such a curious coincidence that Mrs. Bowser sprang to her feet and turned pale.

"Didn't I tell you so!" grimly observed Mr. Bowser, as he started for the door.

He pulled it open in the firm belief that Jones was standing there, but it didn't pan out that way. It was the same man who had called before—the man who never recovered from the Chicago fire. He had returned to see if there hadn't been some

misunderstanding. It was possible that Mr. Bowser had understood him to say that he had lost his all on a horse race or a dog fight, and for that reason had refused him financial assistance. He was making a voluble explanation when Mr. Bowser interrupted with:

"You blamed old scoundrel, but I'll have your life! The idea of such gall! Why, Ill——"

He pushed out of the door and seized the mendicant by the collar and at that instant the cat came flying down stairs. Mental telegraphy had notified her that the front door was open and that the promenading felines of the neighborhood awaited her arrival to lead the grand march. As she went out on the jump she struck Mr. Bowser's legs, and the next instant two men and a cat went rolling down the steps. It was three minutes later when Mr. Bowser limped into the hall. The fire sufferer had hooped it with his coat ripped up the back and the cat had dodged the issue and scaled three fences.

"Well, why didn't Jones come in?" asked Mrs. Bowser, who had not left her chair.

Mr. Bowser did not answer. Reaching out for the banister he pulled himself from step to step with a clump! clump! clump! and she heard him swear and kick a door as he reached the upper hall. Then she knew that Jones and the cat and the cook and the performance was over for the evening.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HE BUYS A FIRE-EXTINGUISHER.

Just as the Bowsers had finished dinner the other evening an express wagon drove up with a parcel, and as it was brought in Mrs. Bowser looked at it and turned for an explanation. Mr. Bowser didn't give one until they got up stairs; then he assumed a look of superior wisdom and began:

"Do you know the money value of the property annually destroyed by fire in the United States?"

"It must be quite large," replied Mrs. Bowser.

"It amounts to tens of millions of dollars, my dear woman. Not only that, but at least 1,000 lives are sacrificed to the fire fiend every year. Business is interrupted and ruined, homes made desolate, wives made widows and children made orphans by the devouring element. You should read up on the statistics. They will furnish you more food for reflection than a hundred novels."

"Have you posted yourself?" she asked, with a tartness to her tones.

"Certainly I have. You don't imagine I am talking through the top of my head, do you? It

was my duty to post myself, and I know all about it. There were just 11,329 fires in the country last year, and the loss was exactly \$128,282,747.29. The point I set out to make is that of these 11,329 fires 9,288 were due to carelessness."

"How carelessness?"

"The carelessness of women and children mostly. Every time you heat your curling tongs you may set fire to the house. The cook's carelessness may start a fire in the kitchen. You light the gas and drop a match. The cook flings matches about where the rats can get at them. At any hour of the day or night your absentmindedness may reduce this home to ashes."

"And how about your leaving lighted cigar stubs around?" asked Mrs. Bowser. "You have burned three holes in this carpet, spoiled the piano cover, set the curtains on fire and done other damage."

"Woman, I am talking statistics!" shouted Mr. Bowser as he turned on her with such majestic dignity that the cat wondered if she had ever met him before. "Passing over the fact that you and the cook and even this infernal old cat are liable to set this house on fire any day in the year, let me say that if people had been prepared for fires there would not have been half the loss of property given in the statistics."

"While I can't watch over you from hour to



hour, I can in a measure offset your carelessness by being prepared to nip a conflagration in the bud."

"Then that package down stairs is a conflagration nipper?" she asked.

"Don't try to be funny, woman. This is a matter not only of dollars and cents, but of life and death, and I want it treated seriously. The package down in the hall is a fire extinguisher. You may at some time or other have heard of one, the same as you have heard of a pile driver or a thrashing machine."

"Yes, I have heard of them."

"They are to extinguish incipient conflagrations. For instance, I awake at midnight and smell smoke. I leap out of bed and come down here to find a fire just starting in that closet—a fire due to your carelessness. Left to itself for five minutes more and away would go the house and our lives, but by means of the extinguisher I extinguish."

"Which is very kind of you," she observed.

"Still trying to be funny, are you? The object is to provoke me, but it will fail. I have not yet purchased the extinguisher, but have brought it home to test it. I want you to learn how to handle it, so that you may be prepared in my absence. It will also be well for the cook to know how."

"Are you going to set the house afire in order to put it out?"

"No, ma'am; I'm not. I am going to set fire to a pile of newspapers on the cement floor of the cellar and then show you how to douse the flames out. There will be some little smoke, but that can go out of the windows."

Mrs. Bowser felt certain that some disaster would happen if anything of the sort was attempted, but it was either give in or have a row, and she gave in. The cook felt the same way, but she wanted to keep her place for the winter. Before going down cellar Mr. Bowser unwrapped the extinguisher and explained what it was charged with and how it worked. He also gave a brief history of the great Chicago fire, which might have been prevented by a cool man and an extinguisher. Then the trio proceeded down cellar, and he heaped up a lot of old newspapers and gave a history of the Boston conflagration, which could also have been checked in its infancy by one squirt from a squirter.

"Now, then," he continued, as he opened the cellar windows and got ready to strike a match, "we will make this scene as realistic as possible. It is midnight. I awake to smell smoke and hear the faint crackling of the destructive flames. I bound out of bed without saying anything to Mrs. Bowser, and as I come down stairs I find the cellar ablaze. It is from the cook's carelessness as she brought up coal for morning. I seize the extin-

guisher and come dashing down, and, though it appears as if no human power could stay the conflagration, I tackle it and have it out in twenty seconds. I will now light the papers and show you how the thing works."

As the papers were alight he rushed up stairs after the extinguisher. A minute later he reappeared with it strapped to his back and the nozzle in his hand. He had meant to keep very cool and do the thing up beautifully, but he grew excited over it, and as he was met by a volume of smoke he lost his head and his footing at the same time. With a whoop and a yell he fell forward down stairs and rolled over and over to the cellar bottom. As he rolled, the extinguisher tried to extinguish, but instead of the stream striking the flames it played on Mr. Bowser's head and feet and body, on the ceiling above and the walls around, on the women who tried to rush forward and help him up. The pile of papers blazed, and the smoke poured out of the windows, and it wasn't thirty seconds before someone was pounding at the front door and yelling "Fire." Mrs. Bowser and the cook dodged the fire and the extinguisher and fled up stairs, but it was too late. A score of people came crowding in as soon as the door was opened, and without asking questions they dived down into the kitchen and snatched up anything that could hold water.

Mr. Bowser had got up by this time and had



WITH A WHOOP AND A YELL HE FELL  
FORWARD DOWN STAIRS.



got control of the squirter, but he couldn't get upstairs for the people who were throwing down water. As he yelled and shouted and swore an engine came rattling up, a hose nozzle was thrust into the open window and during the next five minutes 300 barrels of ice cold water gushed into the cellar. Everything, including Mr. Bowser, was afloat and soaked and chilled to the marrow when Mrs. Bowser finally made the overzealous populace understand the situation. Then Mr. Bowser was hauled out of the window by a fireman, and while Mrs. Bowser and the cat stood on the steps above and the populace crowded around, the fireman held the fire statistician up against the wall and called him seventeen kinds of a Buncombe County fool and added that he ought to be drowned like a rat in a tub. Five minutes later Mr. Bowser stood in his own front hall, with the door shut after him, and the crowd dispersed. He was soaked and limpy and smoke begrimed and half scared to death, but he remembered his dignity.

"Well, the incipient conflagration has been extinguished," observed Mrs. Bowser as she looked him over.

"It is extinguished!" he hoarsely replied. "Yes, woman, the incipient conflagration has not only been extinguished, but you have been extinguished with it!"



"Then it was all my fault, was it?"

"A put up job on me from the start to finish! Woman, I go upstairs to change my clothes. Do not follow me to offer explanations or assistance or to finish your work by stabbing me in the back! I know you at last—at last—and—and—"

And he pulled himself up step by step, and he halted at every step to point his finger at her and nod his head. He meant by that the most dire revenge a human being can conjure up, but she only sighed and wiped up the puddles of water left behind him.

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Directly after dinner the other evening Mr. Bowser slipped out of the house without a word, and when he returned, half an hour later, he had two packages under his arm. Mrs. Bowser didn't say a word, knowing that if he had anything on his mind he would presently explain, and after a bit he began:

"Mrs. Bowser, we have been using gas for years and years."

"Yes," she replied.

"And every month for the last ten years we have been robbed in the most shame-faced manner. Knowing that we were being robbed, but feeling my helplessness in the matter, I have at times spoken rather sharply to you about the gas bills."



"Yes, you have raised a row every month, though you knew I was as careful as could be."

"I wouldn't assume that tone if I were you," he continued as his face sobered up. "You may have been careful or extravagant, but with that we have nothing to do at present. I figure that in the last ten years we have been robbed of at least \$1,000 by the gas company."

"Is it possible!"

"It is not only possible, madam, but it is a fact. Figures don't lie, and here are the figures. We have been as saving as possible, and yet the less gas we burned the more we have been robbed. The last hair has been laid on the camel's back. I propose to stop the highway robber dead in his tracks."

"Are we to burn kerosene?" she queried.

"No, madam, we are not. We are to continue to burn gas, but it will be our own gas, and we will pay for only what we burn. We can light every burner in the house and keep 'em going all night for about fifty cents a week."

"You—you have got some new fad!" stammered Mrs. Bowser as she looked at the packages.

"I don't know what you mean by 'fad.' I have never had one in my life. No man is clearer of them. What I propose doing is to make my own illuminating gas and save about \$250 a year, and if you have any fault to find with that, go ahead.

Some wives would cheerfully enter into the spirit of the thing, but of course you will throw cold water over it."

"How will you make gas?"

"Simplest thing in the world. I fill a two gallon jug nearly full of water. Then I add this pint of sulphuric acid and this pound of nails. Then I exhaust the air from the jug, put a gas burner through the cork, and by means of a pipe I lead the gas to the meter. The formula is right in the encyclopedia, but I never got on to it until to-day. I'll get a jug from the cook and go right at it. That is, I will prepare things for to-morrow evening."

It would have done no good to talk to him. Having set his mind on the experiment, nothing but a broken leg would have stopped him. He found a jug in the kitchen and charged it according to directions, and for fear of accident it was placed alongside the back fence. When Mr. Bowser returned to the family sitting room his face was beaming and he was rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"Our own gas plant and a saving of \$250 a year!" he chuckled. "I'll give that acid twenty-four hours in which to eat up the nails, and then I'll show you whether I'm a man of fads or straight business."

Mrs. Bowser couldn't be drawn out, but he didn't let that fact dampen his ardor. He talked of

nothing but gas plants during the evening, and he went to bed to dream of jugs and acids and nails and gas burners and highway robbers. When he left home in the morning he gave explicit directions that no one should go within five feet of the jug, and his impatience brought him home half an hour ahead of his usual time in the afternoon. He found the jug all right, and after bolting his dinner he announced his readiness to go on with the experiment.

"Just how are you going to proceed?" queried Mrs. Bowser as he rose from the table.

"Why, the directions are as simple as A, B, C," he replied. "I insert a burner into the cork and touch a match to it."

"But I've been reading about it. Don't you see it says you must first exhaust the air in the jug? How will you do it?"

"That's all nonsense! If I take out the cork the air will escape, as a matter of course. I propose to let it escape."

"I don't believe that will do. If it says exhaust the air, then it means—"

"I'm running this experiment," he interrupted, "and I think I know what I'm about. I want a burner and something to bore a hole through the cork, and then I'll make an illumination to astonish the neighbors."

Ten minutes later all was ready. The jug had

been placed in the middle of the yard and Mrs. Bowser had gone to the front of the house and the cook down cellar. Mr. Bowser sniffed with satisfaction at the odor escaping from the jug, and scratching a match on his leg, he reached out to the burner. A flame at once shot up three feet high and he stepped back and flourished his arms and shouted:

"She's a success—a grand success! No more highway robbery—no more—"

Then there was an explosion which seemed to lift the earth under Mr. Bowser's feet, and then a rattling of glass in all the back windows and a yelping from all the curs in the neighborhood. Before Mrs. Bowser could get to the back door a policeman was ringing the bell, and there were five or six pedestrians at his heels. The crowd made its way to the back yard to find Mr. Bowser lying on his back on the grass, looking up at the stars in a wondering way, and on the spot where the jug had stood was a hole big enough to bury a calf.

"Are you dead?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she bent over the recumbent form.

"W—who did that?" gasped Mr. Bowser as he slowly sat up and looked about.

"You did. You did it with your little gas plant. I told you the air must first be exhausted. I didn't expect to find you alive."

"Woman, you—you put a torpedo or something,

into that jug!" shouted Mr. Bowser as it all came back to him. "You wanted the thing to be a failure, and you—you—"

"Madam, if you will lead the way we will follow," interrupted the policeman, and the dazed Mr. Bowser was led into the house and deposited on a chair. Then the officer called him an idiot and went off to his duties. A beetle-browed man advised Mrs. Bowser to have him sent to a lunatic asylum, and then followed the officer. A one-eyed man observed that he would telephone to the Fool-Killer, and each and every one of the rest had some pleasant remark as they passed out. When the house was cleared and the cook had given notice that she would leave at once, Mr. Bowser got out of his chair and fell upon the lounge and turned his face to the wall.

"Well, do you think you can manage to scare up another fad within the week?" inquired Mrs. Bowser.

But he didn't answer. His head was still swimming round and round, and he was trying to figure out how he had escaped the seventeen million fragments of that jug which he had heard whizzing about before he went to grass.

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When Mr. Bowser came home the other evening he had such a preoccupied air about him that Mrs. Bowser at once suspected some bad news and said:

"I am awfully sorry if anything has happened to put you out. What has gone wrong?"

"Nothing—nothing," he replied, as he waved her off. "No, there is nothing to be worried over."

During dinner he was abstracted and absent-minded, and he looked at her as if he was wondering where he had seen her before. The steak was not up to its usual standard, and the cook had failed on the coffee, but he passed those things over without a word. It was not until they had retired to the family sitting-room that an explanation came. He had taken a seat without either a cigar or a newspaper, and was looking fixedly at his toes, when Mrs. Bowser stood before him and said:

"Now, then, have you been struck on the head with a club, taken an overdose of chloral or tumbled down the office stairs? Something ails you, and I want to know what it is."

"I will tell you," he replied as he put his hands to his head and looked at her in a queer way. "You know I'm a believer in occult science."

"Yes, you believe in everything that comes along, even to the weather reports and the sorrowful tales of tramps."

"This is a serious thing, Mrs. Bowser—far too serious for sarcasm. You have heard of mind-reading, of course? For years I have contended that it was possible—"

"And you've gone into another fad, have you?" she interrupted. "I thought it was about time for you to be cutting up some new dido. You've probably been to see Professor Bounce, the great mind-reader?"

"I—I have," he slowly answered, as he rose up and fastened his eyes on a door-knob on the opposite side of the room. "Yes, I have been to see Professor Bounce. He found me a grand subject. He read my mind as you can read a book. Moreover, he gave me a lesson in mind-reading, the results of which will astonish you."

"And you—you have been silly enough to mix up in such business! I suppose the next thing will be to try a fast for forty days and nights, or let them bury you as an experiment. Well, of all the men I ever saw!"

Mr. Bowser got red in the face and was inclined to lose his temper, but remembering that occult science has no temper to lose, he held on to himself and said:

"Facts are facts, and what is the use of ridicule and sarcasm? I can't help it if I have become a mind-reader. The latent force was there, and the Professor has only brought it out. Now, then, give me your hand, concentrate your thoughts on some particular thing, and I will tell you exactly what you are thinking of."



She obeyed instructions, and after looking fixedly at her left ear for thirty seconds he said:

"Ah! I have it. You are thinking of your mother's grave—of how the rain which is pattering down to-night falls upon the turf above her. You are grieving over her loss, and you wish that you had died with her."

"Have you lost your senses?" demanded Mrs. Bowser, as she snatched her hand away. "You know that I had a letter from mother only ten days ago, and that she was then well and hearty. You'd better go out of the mind-reading business and travel with a patent medicine."

"It is just possible that I made a mistake," said Mr. Bowser, as he rubbed his brow; "but if I did it is your fault. You did not concentrate your mind as I told you to. Now, then, try again. Don't think of a dozen things, but only one."

She gave him her hand again and looked at the cat on the opposite side of the room. He looked down on the top of her head with an intense gaze, and by and by a smile crossed his face and he said:

"You are thinking of making a journey to America, and you are wondering whether to take two trunks or six."

"Bosh!" she replied, as she turned away. "I was just wondering if you would kick about the gas bill, which came to-day. If you've got a cigar

in the house you'd better sit down and smoke it, and drop this mind-reading business. You can no more read minds than our cat can read the Bible!"

"You don't want me to, and that's what's the matter!" he almost shouted. "You are thinking of cats, dogs, gas bills, Africa, and fifty other things all at once, and Professor Bounce himself couldn't have hit you. I say that I can read your mind if you'll give me a fair chance."

"I refuse to indulge in any more nonsense of the sort."

"Very well. Perhaps my failure came about in supposing you had a mind to read. I will try the cook."

"The idea of your going down to the cook with any such thing!" she protested.

But he went. Descending to the kitchen, he explained the idea to her. She had heard of mind-reading, and was curious to know how it worked. Flirting the dish-water off her right hand, she gave it to Mr. Bowser, and looked out of the back window and settled her thoughts on a certain matter. Mr. Bowser uttered three or four sighs, whispered a few words to himself, and then said aloud:

"You are thinking of one of your beaux—the tall fellow with the pea-colored ulster who walks in here as if he owned the house."

"No, sir, I wasn't," she replied.

"Girl, don't prevaricate! You were hoping he'd

be here to-night, and also wondering if I'd miss a couple of bottles of beer if you took them."

"That's a bold-faced falsehood," retorted the cook, as her temper boiled up. "I'll tell you exactly what I was thinking of. I was thinking that I ought to have \$2 more a month, and that if I heard you find any more fault about the meals I'd give you a bit of my mind and quit the job at the snap of a finger."

Mr. Bowser didn't stop to bandy words. He was on his way up stairs to have it out with Mrs. Bowser, when the basement bell rang and he answered it in person, hoping to find a subject. It was one, sure enough. It was a tramp of the raggedest and cheekiest kind; but before he could state his case he was pulled inside, and Mr. Bowser said:

"You are just the man I'm looking for. I am a mind-reader. I knew when you turned the corner—I knew when you entered the gate. You came here to tell me that your wife in Boston is dying and to ask for help to reach her bedside."

"Say, old man, what sort of a dance is this?" demanded the tramp, as he tried to get away.

"It's all right, my friend. You will get what you came for, but I want to practice on you a bit. Let me take your hand, and you must fix your mind on some particular thing."

"Go away with you! I had a judge read my



"YOU ARE THINKING OF YOUR BEAUX."



mind last month, and he sent me up for twenty days to pay for it."

"You are thinking," said Mr. Bowser, as he held him by the shoulder—"you are thinking of reaching your poor wife in time to receive her farewell message. Your situation is a sad one, and I shall give you—"

"You'll give me the boot, will you. Not if I know it! Hands off, old man! I thought this was a private house instead of a lunatic asylum, but I'll not stand no kicking even from a crazy man. As for my wife, I never had one, and I was never in Boston. You've got me mixed up with some one else in the purfesh."

"Give me your hand," said Mr. Bowser.

"No, sir! Won't you let go of me? Then take that for luck!"

And he gave Mr. Bowser a blow on the solar plexus which doubled him up and sat him down; then he made his escape on a run. Mrs. Bowser had heard all from the head of the stairs. She slowly descended, looked at Mr. Bowser sitting with his back to the wall and his mouth open in search of breath, and as his eyes rolled around at her she quietly said:

"I am also a mind-reader. At the present moment you are thinking of what an idiot you have made of yourself, and wishing you hadn't done it.

When you get your breath you'd better go up stairs and go to bed."

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"Well, but what's all this?" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he came home to dinner the other evening and found the sitting-room carpet piled in a corner and the room dismantled.

"It's time for house-cleaning, you know," replied Mrs. Bowser. "When you go down in the morning I wish you'd stop at the carpet cleaning place and have them come for that carpet."

He said he would and made a note of it, but after dinner a sudden thought struck him. He stood looking at the carpet for a minute and then said:

"By George, but I'll do it! It'll not only be the best kind of exercise, but save bother and delay. Mrs. Bowser, I'll beat the carpet in the back yard this evening."

"But I don't want you to," she protested. "That carpet has got to go to the cleaning-works and be thoroughly beaten."

"That carpet will be thoroughly beaten right here, my dear. There's a back yard, a stout clothes line, and with the aid of a broom stick I'll knock every speck of dust out of it in ten minutes."

"But please don't try it. It will take two men to handle it, and nobody can beat a carpet in ten



minutes. You couldn't beat it thoroughly in half a day."

"Now, then, see here," he continued, as he began to remove his cuffs; "I want exercise in the arms and shoulders. I'm as stiff as a post. Beating a carpet will be better than the dumb-bells or clubs. An hour's work will make me sleep like a top to-night."

"But something will happen and you'll—you'll raise a row!" she faltered.

"Bosh! Nothing will happen, and there'll be no row. It's twenty years since I beat a carpet, and it will bring back the old days. Your father was beating a carpet in the back yard when I asked your hand in marriage."

"I'll pay for having it beaten out of my own money, if you'll let it alone."

"It isn't a question of expense, Mrs. Bowser," he answered, "though we might as well save the \$2 as to give it to the beaters. As I said, I want the exercise. I also believe that I can knock out more microbes and germs with a broom stick than any steam carpet beater in the world. I'll shift into an old suit, and then I'll give you a few lessons on how to beat a carpet all in the merry spring-time, heigho."

Mrs. Bowser continued to protest, but without avail. As soon as he got into an old suit of clothes, he spat on his hands and made a sudden jump and

seized the monster bundle and gave a wrench and a pull. He was successful in worrying it along to the door leading to the basement, but then there came a hitch. Mrs. Bowser took advantage of it to offer to buy theater tickets for the evening if he would go, but he could not be moved from his purpose.

"Just you go down and hunt me up a broom stick, and then stand by to see the fur fly," he responded, and she passed down ahead of him.

As the bundle of carpet was larger than the door-way, it did not need much acumen to see that the one had either to be enlarged or the other compressed. Compression seemed to be the quickest way out of it, and Mr. Bowser spread himself all over the bundle and braced and tugged until it suddenly rolled through the doorway. He hadn't planned to go with it, but somehow he did. It was an even start. Mr. Bowser was also on top half the time going down stairs, but on reaching the hall below he was underneath, and it took the united exertions of Mrs. Bowser and the cook and the grocer's boy to set him at liberty.

"Some one pushed that carpet, and I know it!" he shouted, as he got the dust out of his throat and struggled up.

"But we were all down here," protested Mrs. Bowser. "I told you something would happen,

and so it has. It's a wonder you didn't break your back or neck. Won't you let it alone now?"

"Never, Mrs. Bowser—never will I be baffled by an old carpet. I have set out to beat it, and beat it I will or break my neck twice in two. It rather got away from me on the stairs, but it's all in the exercise, you know. Now, then, out she comes!"

He couldn't have moved the bundle a foot but for the help of the boy and the cook. After a tug which tired everybody out, it was landed at the back door. Then the cook and the boy withdrew and Mr. Bowser set about getting the carpet over the clothes-line. There are men who have done such things and lived to boast of it, but the instances are rare. There is no affinity between a bundle of twenty-eight yards of Axminster carpet and a wire clothes-line, and Mr. Bowser soon discovered it. By herculean exertions he could get a corner over the line, and it would stay while he held it, but that was all the progress he could make. After five or six failures he let the corner fall, jumped on the roll with both feet and gave utterance to his feelings. Mrs. Bowser was on hand to say:

"I told you not to try it. It would take the strength of three men to get the carpet over the line."

"Woman, am I running this carpet, or are you?" he demanded, as he turned on her.

"But you can't lift it up."

"Then I'll die trying! When I want your advice about beating a carpet I'll ask for it!"

She went back into the house, and he figured a little. He decided that if the carpet were spread out on the ground it could be beaten just as well as if hung up, and he drew a long breath and began unrolling it. He had unrolled about three yards when his feet stepped on each other and he fell down, and the number of tacks waiting to receive him was just seventeen. He felt every one of them at once, and was surprised into a yell, which brought a dozen heads to as many back windows to see who was being murdered. When Mrs. Bowser got out he was trying to climb the back fence, but she caught him by the legs and pulled him down and exclaimed:

"Now, then, have you gone crazy! What's the matter with you?"

"The blamed thing is full of tarantulas or buzz-saws!" he gasped, "and about a hundred of them got their teeth into me at once!"

"It was tacks, Mr. Bowser. You ought to have looked out for them. Look at your hands! And your neck and ears are bloody! I told you in the beginning that—"

He interrupted her with a gesture, then rushed

forward and kicked the roll until his legs could kick no longer. She started to tell him that all the neighbors were looking and laughing, but he froze her with a glare, and picking up the broom stick pounded away until it was only a splinter in his hand. Then he drew himself up and walked into the kitchen and up stairs. After a minute she followed him. She knew what was coming, but could not avoid it. He was waiting for her, and promptly said:

"Woman, you have succeeded in your plans!"

"My plans—how?"

"To get me almost butchered alive, and to make me the laughing-stock of the neighborhood!"

"But didn't I tell you—"

"No, ma'am, you didn't—not a word! I see through the whole thing. There is your infernal old carpet out there. I am going out. I am going to see my lawyer. I may never return. I bid you good-bye—good-bye forever!"

But at midnight he came sneaking back to his home and his bed, and next morning when four men drove up in a wagon to take the carpet away he pretended neither to see nor to hear.

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Dinner was half over before Mr. Bowser's secret came out. He hadn't discovered a new spring tonic nor bought anything new in rat-traps. For a month or more, without giving himself away by

as much as a wink, he had been quietly investigating the merits of the horseless carriage. He hadn't jumped to conclusions. It was only after weighing the pros and cons several times over that he had made up his mind that a horseless carriage was a good thing. It saved horses; it saved harness and horseshoes; it saved oats and curry combs and horse blankets. A horseless carriage never had the colic or poll evil. There was just exactly one hundred reasons why a horseless carriage was better than a live horse and a detached carriage.

"Well, what of all this?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as he paused for breath.

"What of all this? Why, I'm going to buy a horseless carriage, of course."

"You don't mean it!"

"Why not? We have long wanted a horse and carriage. We need the fresh air and recreation it will give us. More than a dozen doctors have told me that if I didn't get out more my lungs would go."

"But I'd never dare ride in a horseless carriage," she protested. "Please give up the idea. Your lungs are all right and I'm sure—"

"Mrs. Bowser," he interrupted, "we are to have a horseless carriage. That is, a friend of mine who owns one and can be induced to part with it, is coming around here with the vehicle in about an

hour. We are to try it, and if pleased in every respect I shall give him my check."

"And you are to manage the vehicle?"

"I am to manage. I haven't said a word about it, but I've been out with the carriage on three different occasions. I can manage it to perfection. I can drive it ten thousand miles and never graze a thing. It's a bright moonlight night, and we'll take a ten-mile spin and have lots of fun over it. Better get yourself ready."

"I—I don't think I'll go, and I wish you would give this thing up. If you will I'll never say another word about your other fads."

"Other fads!" shouted Mr. Bowser, as he fired up in an instant. "Woman, I've heard enough about the fad business! One would think me a fool to hear you talk. If it's a fad to buy a \$750 horseless carriage for \$500, then it's a fad to buy meat for dinner. If you don't want to go along with me this evening then you can stay at home."

"But—I don't want you to go, either," she protested. "A horseless carriage is a dangerous thing to trifle with. You can't have had much experience, and I feel certain there will be an accident. Don't be angry with me, and don't run any foolish risks."

"Mrs. Bowser," he said, after a long look at her, "I have lived for forty-five years without a guardian, and I object to one now. I think I know



what I'm doing. I shall try this horseless carriage this evening. I shall buy it. I shall make daily use of it. There is no need of any quarreling. You can take your outings in a rocking chair and die of consumption."

At that moment the vehicle arrived and Mr. Bowser went out to meet it. When the owner inquired why Mrs. Bowser had not appeared he was told that she was not feeling well. He seemed a bit relieved at the news and added:

"I guess you'd better take me along with you this evening. I don't think anything will get out of order, but you'll have more confidence in yourself if I'm along."

"Oh, I've plenty of confidence," replied Mr. Bowser. "I'm just going to scoot up and down in front of the house for awhile. Mrs. Bowser is a little bit shy of the carriage, but when she looks out of the window and sees me gliding along she'll get over her nervousness."

"You are sure you've got the hang of it?"

"Perfectly sure. It's as easy as spinning a top."

"Look out when you cross the car tracks up there, and take due notice of the brick pile down the street. I wouldn't make the speed over about four miles an hour."

Mr. Bowser mounted to the seat with all the confidence of a man starting to drive a pig out of the garden. As he started the vehicle up he no-

ticed Mrs. Bowser and the family cat taking a peep at him from a front window, and there was exultation in his heart. He'd make that carriage get up and hump itself or run the four wheels up a tree. He made the first block in tolerably good shape, though taking up most of the street, and then he put on steam to beat a street car at the crossing. As he did so he just missed an old woman with a market-basket who was crossing the street, and as he crossed the tracks he made such a close shave of being run down by the car that the motorman had five years added to his age in ten seconds. He yelled at Mr. Bowser, and the conductor seconded his efforts as the rear end of the car came along, but as the horseless carriage was taking a short cut over the sidewalk and around a lamp post their profane greetings were unheard. Five minutes later the vehicle drew up in front of the Bowser mansion in good shape, but the owner of the horseless carriage anxiously remarked:

"If I were you I'd go a little slow. This thing wasn't built to climb trees or jump fences."

"Don't worry about me," replied Mr. Bowser, as he set off down the street, but there was cause to worry before he had gone half a block. A man was carrying a ladder across the street and the vehicle hit the ladder and slewed the whole United States around and piled it in a heap and ran over it. The man with the ladder got up and swore.

He swore in English, French and German, but Mr. Bowser was a block and a half away and turning around for the spin home. He knew that Mrs. Bowser and the cat would be looking, and he pulled the throttle wide open to cut a dash. That big brick pile was only half a block away and occupying half the street. He saw it and he aimed to miss it by ten feet, but five seconds later there was a yell and a crash which brought out a hundred people in no time. The horseless had tried its best to climb the brick pile, but had succeeded in getting only half way up. They found a tangle of wheels, spokes, splinters, rods and levers, and in the midst of the tangle was Mr. Bowser. He wasn't saying a word. Indeed, it was two hours after they lugged him into the house before he said anything. By that time the doctor had patched him up, the police had driven the crowd away, and Mrs. Bowser and the family cat had figured out how it all came about.

"Has—has anything happened?" asked Mr. Bowser, as he looked around in a puzzled way.

"Nothing much," quickly replied Mrs. Bowser. "You've simply been taking a ride in a horseless carriage."

"And why—why am I in bed and all bandaged up?"

"Oh, you are just resting and getting ready for the next fad."



**JUST MISSED AN OLD WOMAN WITH A MARKET BASKET  
WHO WAS CROSSING THE STREET.**



Then Mr. Bowser closed his eyes with a sigh, Mrs. Bowser turned down the gas a little, and the cat went down stairs to look for mice and get the smell of arnica and camphor out of her nostrils.

## CHAPTER V.

### MR. BOWSER'S DAY IN THE COUNTRY.

Mr. Bowser had been reading the paper for an hour and permitting the cat to rub herself against his legs at will, when he suddenly looked up and exclaimed:

"By George, but I've got an idea! Mrs. Bowser, what do you say to a picnic?"

"What sort of a picnic?" she asked.

"Why, the two of us will go into the country for a day with a lunch basket, and wander among the green fields and sylvan dells and have a merry time. Say, it will be too jolly for anything! It will do us more good than a barrel of medicine."

"I—I don't think I'd like to tramp around in swamps and thistle patches," she answered after a moment, "and I'm sure you would come home feeling no better for it."

"Who said anything about swamps and thistle patches?" he demanded. "I'm talking about meadows filled with daisies and of cool, green woods echoing the songs of thousands of birds. Even the sight of a lamb frolicking on the hillside



would put new life into us. We'll make an early start and stay all day, and I'll bet dollars to cents you'll come home singing with happiness. You'd better tell the cook to get a lunch ready."

"I don't think I'll go."

"You don't! What's the matter with you?"

"I've got to go to the Dorcas society. I'm one of the officers, you know."

"The Dorcas society be hanged!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser. "What you want is a day in the country, and if the old hens of the Dorcas can't cackle without you, they'll have to keep still for once."

Mrs. Bowser had other reasons—reasons which she did not care to state. She knew that Mr. Bowser would set out in great good nature, but that the picnic would result in a calamity before the day was done. She therefore continued to excuse herself, and of course it ended by his saying:

"Very well, Mrs Bowser—very well. If you want to stay at home and roast while I am seated in shady dells, I have no objections. While I am sniffing the odor of bluebells you'll be smelling corned beef and cabbage, and while I'm listening to babbling brooks you'll be hearing the screeches of the street peddlers. Have it your own way, but I'm going on a picnic."

"Not alone?" she asked.

"You bet your life! In fact, I'd rather go alone than to have you along. Yes, sir, I shall go out

and spend the day in the country and have a good time, and you can run right along to your Dorcas society."

While he was grumpy all the rest of the evening, Mrs. Bowser figured that he would give up the idea by morning and forget all about it. He didn't, however. He was up earlier than usual, and gave the cook orders himself to put him up a lunch, and at breakfast he announced his firm intention of holding a one-man picnic. Wifelike, Mrs. Bowser relented, and would have sacrificed herself, but he turned on her with:

"I go to the gamboling lambs, babbling brooks and shady dells, and you stay right here among the flies, microbes and cats!"

Half an hour later he set out with his lunch basket on his arm. He didn't care two cents about going, but he wanted Mrs. Bowser to understand that she couldn't bluff him. At the corner he took a trolley car for the country, and the fun began at once. It was an open car, with a fat man on the end seat, and Mr. Bowser climbed over him and muttered something about human hogs. The fat man jawed back, and but for the conductor there would have been a grapple to the death. By the time the country was reached Mr. Bowser's temperature was 210, and as he looked around him it jumped another twenty degrees. There were a saloon, a stable and an electric power

house. There were a few feeble-looking apple trees and two or three fields filled with weeds. It was a mile to the nearest wood, and the highway was ankle deep with dust, and the day was a scorcher, but that one-man picnic was bound to come off at any cost and at all hazards. Mr. Bowser looked for gamboling lambs as he trudged along, but the butchers had bought them all up for chops in the spring. He looked for babbling brooks, but they all turned out to be frog ponds. Half way to the wood he met a tramp, and "Weary" accosted him with:

"Say, cully, what misfortune caused ye to take to de hoof? Sit down and tell me de yarn."

"Sir! Do you know who you are addressing?" demanded Mr. Bowser, in reply.

"No, but I'd like to. Are ye callin' yerself Rube de Rusher or Lije de Limper? Sit down and work yer chin and git some p'inters from an old vet."

Mr. Bowser passed on, but his temperature went still higher as the tramp hurled cuss words at his back and the dust in the road grew deeper. When he reached the wood at last, he sank down under a gnarled oak which was throwing its grateful shade over an empty beer bottle some bicyclist had left behind, and for ten long minutes he gave himself up to the cheerful thoughts of how he would murder the family cat if he ever lived to get home.

The hot sun had developed a headache, and the rough walk had brought out two soft corns. In addition, he hadn't found anything that babbled or gamboled, and had been sassed by a tramp and insulted by a fat man. That one-man picnic would have been declared off by most men, but Mr. Bowser was made of sterner stuff. He got up after a while and went looking for a shady dell. He had just found a cheap one-horse dell which he thought might do at a pinch when a wandering bumblebee plumped against his neck and lifted him clear off the ground with a yell. It took him a quarter of an hour to get over the pain of the sting, and the swelling was so big that he had to carry his head on his left shoulder, but he didn't give up his picnic on that account.

"I told Mrs. Bowser I'd have a picnic, and I'll have one or die!" muttered Mr. Bowser, as he got out of the dell and went looking for a babbling brook.

He found a ditch which drained a swamp, but it didn't babble. It was simply working nine hours per day for ten hours' wages. He fell into a hole as he looked around for the bluebells of the woodland, and he fell over a log as he listened for the tap of the woodpecker and the squeal of the squirrel. He had to realize at last that there was nothing in the green wood for him, and then he softly swore by the dust of the dead Bowsers that he'd



WHEN A WANDERING BUMBLEBEE LIFTED HIM CLEAR  
OFF THE GROUND.



never go home till he had culled the daisy. It was his oath that took him out of the wood into a meadow. It was a meadow under a seven per cent mortgage, and the grass grew scant, and the milk-weeds and mulleins flourished galore. While Mr. Bowser looked for daisies, an old bull looked for him. The bull got through looking and got down to business first. As he figured out that he had an easy mark, his head went down and his tail went up, and he tried to get up a gait of a mile a minute as he charged.

Mr. Bowser had no electric motor under his vest, but the way he traveled forty rods and fell over a fence into the highway made the bovine behind him feel sick. The basket had been left in the bumblebee dell, and there was nothing to detain the excursionist in that particular locality any longer. As he trudged back to the car terminal, two more soft corns showed up, three or four limps rung in on his legs, and he discovered that his nose and ears were peeling under the burn of the sun. The shades of evening were falling with the usual crash when Mr. Bowser stood once more in his ancestral hall, but there was still light enough for Mrs. Bowser and the cat to look him over. The cat looked and shivered, and turned away with an icy clutch at her heart, but as Mrs. Bowser gazed at the wreck before her, she managed to murmur:



"Mr. Bowser always looks after the tramps who call, and you'll have to go away and come again: He's out in the country on a picnic and won't be home for an hour or two yet."

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"You may have observed," said Mr. Bowser as he left the dinner table the other evening—"you may have observed, Mrs. Bowser, that for the last three or four days I have not eaten enough to keep a chicken alive?"

"I hadn't observed any falling off in your appetite," she replied as she wondered what new fad had got hold of him.

"Probably not. There are wives who never observe anything until their husbands are ready to be buried. The fact remains, however, that I have lost my appetite and have such a weak and languid feeling that I can scarcely move about. If something is not done I shall be down in bed."

"Well, why don't you go to a doctor?"

"I have lost all faith in doctors. They would feel of my pulse, look at my tongue and order me to take a voyage around the world, so that I might not die on their hands. No; I shall not go to the doctor."

"Then what will you do?" asked Mrs. Bowser, with considerable solicitude.

"Doctor myself. Knowing what ails me as I do and having a remedy at hand, I shall be my own

physician and hope to be all right within a couple of weeks. In talking my case over with Brown to-day he recommended something which he has tried himself with the grandest results."

"You—you are going to dope yourself again!" she exclaimed in despairing tones as she turned away.

"Dope! Dope! I wish you would be a little more choice in your language. I have lost my appetite. I have found something to restore it. Do you call that dope? It makes no difference whether you do or not, however. I shall prepare the remedy and take it according to directions. Tell the cook that I shall want to use the range for half an hour or so."

"What is your remedy?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"Something as simple as it is efficacious. In the old days of pioneer life what did our grandfathers and grandmothers do when they lost their appetites?"

"I never heard that they lost them."

"There are several things you never heard of, and I am always willing to post you on what you don't know. When our progenitors lost their appetites, they turned to roots and barks and made tonics. I have followed their example. Here is a package of powdered roots and barks—five kinds of roots and four kinds of barks. I propose to

make four gallons of what you may call root beer and take it as an invigorator."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Bowser as she started upstairs. "But if anything happens I want you to remember that I had nothing to do with it."

"Nothing will happen—that is, nothing will happen except that my appetite will be restored and my life move on again as before."

The cook vacated the kitchen at his approach. There were directions on the package, as to how to prepare the root beer, and Mr. Bowser followed them as far as placing a boiler over the stove with four gallons of water in it. Then it occurred to him that the decoction ought to have a twang to it to hit the lethargic appetite. There was mustard in the pantry, and he dropped a liberal quantity into the water. There was ginger, also, and after a little thought he decided to add some of that.

"In that way I'll kill two birds with one stone," he said to himself. "I'll have root beer and ginger ale out of the same bottle."

He was watching the boiling when the cook came down on an errand. She was a woman of thirty, with a domestic look, and it struck Mr. Bowser that she must know more or less about the tonics of our forefathers. He told her of the mixture and asked if she could think of anything to add.

"I've seen my brother make root beer," she re-

plied, "and I think he put in about a dozen different things. They say you can't get too much in it."

"No; I don't believe you can," he mused. "The roots and barks are all right for a foundation, but the stuff wants spicing up into an elixir. I'll make something that kings of old would have howled for."

He found lemons and squeezed in a couple. He found nutmegs and grated up one. There was cinnamon, and he threw in a liberal quantity. The last thing he got hold of was a bottle of extract of vanilla. He didn't intend to use over half the contents, but when all went in he thought a high vanilla flavor might be the best, after all. When the mixture had been given a good boil, it was removed and carried out into the back yard to cool. A pitcherful was dipped out and placed in the ice box for immediate use, and while it was cooling Mr. Boyser sat down and felt that he had struck a good thing. The smell from that boiler wasn't half bad. As he sat watching it half a dozen cats appeared on the back fences and sniffed and yowled.

"They smell it and know a good thing!" he chuckled. "If I have any to spare I'll leave it out here. I suppose cats lose their appetites, same as human beings, and I sha'n't begrudge 'em a pint or so."

Half an hour later he went upstairs with pitcher and tumbler. There was joy in his heart and a smile on his face as he sat down and said:

"My dear Mrs. Bowser, if you want the spring of youth which Ponce de Leon looked for in vain just quaff a glass of this. If it don't knock five years off your age I'm a goat."

"Thanks, but I don't care for any," she replied.

"All right—more left for me. Ah! but that is good—that is delicious! Wine a hundred years old is not in it with root beer. I'll get up in the morning with an appetite like a horse. I suppose about three glasses is enough for a first experiment? Do you know, I believe there'd be \$10,000 a year profit in making this beer and selling it by the barrel?"

Mr. Bowser went down and drove the cats away and brought in the boiler and half an hour later the family went to bed. He went around patting himself on the vest and telling how the tonic had gone to the right spot, and Mrs. Bowser finally got the idea that he might have struck a good thing. She had just fallen asleep when that idea was dispelled. Mr Bowser suddenly uttered a groan like a horse stricken down in the prime of life, and next moment he sat up in bed and exclaimed:

"For the land's sake, but how I do suffer!"

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Bowser as she jumped out of bed.

"My stomach! I'm deathly sick, and pains shoot through me. Whew! Ouch! Say, I'm a dead man!"

"It's that appetite restorer. Probably it was intended to act this way. Just lie quiet and let it get a good hold."

But Mr. Bowser couldn't. In five minutes he was being twisted into a dozen strange shapes by colicky pains, and his nausea made him sweat like a steer in a cornfield. Mrs. Bowser had not said half she wanted to about appetite restorers, but she lost no time in telephoning for the family physician. When he arrived he found a very sick man, and it was a long two hours before the pains eased up and gave him a chance to inquire what had brought them on. With tears in his eyes Mr. Bowser owned up to the roots and 'barks and vanilla and nutmeg and other things, and the doctor made no reply to him. He turned to Mrs. Bowser instead and said:

"I will try and find the fool killer's address, and next time you have to telephone get him instead of me and tell him to bring his biggest clubs along!"

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Whenever Mr. Bowser has any lofty purpose in view Mrs. Bowser can detect it as soon as he enters the house, and, though the knowledge may

not aid her to turn him aside, it somewhat prepares her for the shock to come.

He had been very quiet for a week and had not even hinted at buying hogs or chickens when he came home with a glow on his face.

In addition to the glow, there was a look of stern resolution, and her heart beat faster as she wondered whether he was going to experiment with the gas meter or overhaul the interior of the piano.

He treated her with a bland condescension during the dinner hour and had no information to give, and it was not until the meal was finished that he said:

"Mrs. Bowser you may have seen something in the papers about the dispute between Prof. Boxly and Dr. Hurley?"

"I don't remember," she replied.

"Probably not. If it had been a bit of social scandal, you'd have remembered all about it, but as it related to medical science you didn't think it worth reading.

"The dispute, as I may inform you, arose over the cause of malaria. The doctor asserted that mosquitoes caused malaria by inoculating human beings, and the professor contended that the moon was directly responsible for it."

"But how could the moon be responsible? What an absurd idea!"



"Don't go too fast, my dear woman. If you had read his articles, you would not call the idea absurd. Have you ever noticed a mist rising from the earth at night?"

"Of course."

"Well, that mist is caused by the moon, even when the moon is not to be seen. The mist is sometimes quite dense. At other times you do not perceive it. This mist is composed of the germs of malaria. There is always most mist at a full moon, and consequently the number of cases of malaria are greater. Do you follow me?"

"No, I don't," replied Mrs. Bowser. "I don't believe the moon is any more responsible for malaria than my old shoes, while it is quite likely that mosquitoes are."

"Good! Good!" chuckled Mr. Bowser. "I am glad to hear you express a decided opinion. We now come to the point in the case. I have decided in the interests of medical science to prove or disprove the professor's theory."

"W-what are you going to do?"

"Offer myself as a sacrifice. To-night we have a glorious full moon, and there will be a mist. I will sit in the full orb of night and make a square test. If malaria follows, then it follows that Prof. Boxly is right. If not, then I will permit myself to be bitten by mosquitoes to-morrow night."

"But if you have a bad case of malaria you may die," protested Mrs. Bowser.

"Exactly, my dear woman—exactly," said Mr. Bowser, with a flourish of his hand. "If I die, however, it will be in the interests of science and save thousands of others. Some one has got to sacrifice himself, and why shouldn't it be me?"

Mrs. Bowser could say nothing further.

Having made up his mind to sit in the moonlight, Mr. Bowser would sit there even if the house took fire.

He was in no hurry, however. He got down the encyclopedia and looked up "Malaria" and "Mosquitoes," and by 10 o'clock he felt himself thoroughly posted. As Mrs. Bowser was ready to go up stairs she asked:

"Where do you propose to carry out this experiment?"

"I shall sit on the front steps," he replied.

"And how long will it take?"

"I can't say about that. I'll give it two hours anyhow. You go right to bed and don't worry about me. It will take the malaria germs a day or two to develop. I think I'll take the cat out for company."

Five minutes later he took a seat on the top step, with the cat at his left hand.

It was a warm and balmy night, and he was in his shirt sleeves and bareheaded.

The cat wasn't up on malaria or mosquitoes, and she didn't care a continental whether the moon was full, or not in sight at all, but she purred in contentment and kept her eyes open for flying bugs.

Mr. Bowser wasn't doing his work in a slipshod fashion. He had notebook and pencil with him, and he jotted down notes for the benefit of Prof. Boxly and mankind in general:

"10 o'clock—Just sat down in the full light of the moon."

"10:05—Think I observe a slight mist."

"10:10—Am positive there is a mist."

"10:20—Feel shivery, and the cat has shuddered once or twice."

"10:30—Slight coldness up and down the spine."

"10:40—The cat is looking around in a strange manner, as if seeing germs."

"11 o'clock—Cat is still uneasy, and I believe I have absorbed the germs of malaria. If the disease should prove fatal——"

That was the end of his notes. Just then an old woman with a cane and a basket came along and halted at the gate.

Mr. Bowser was watching for mists and gave her no attention until she opened the gate and entered and said:

"Yes, it's the same man, and now he's got to make things right."

"What's the matter, my good woman?" he asked.

"The matter is that you passed a lead nickel off on a poor widder. I want a good nickel in exchange."

"You mean you came here asking for charity and I gave you a bad coin?"

"That's it, sir. You knew it was a widder who hadn't bread in the house, but you worked a game on me."

"I never did!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser. "You must be mistaken in the house."

"Not at all, sir. I remember your bald head and red face and way of speaking. Yes, it was you, and now you must do the right thing or I'll make trouble."

"Woman, go on! I know nothing about it. You are either drunk or crazy."

But she refused to go. On the contrary, she began talking in such shrill tones that the neighbors wakened and looked out of their windows.

Mr. Bowser forgot the moon, the mists, mosquitoes and malaria and seized the woman by the arm and led her to the gate.

She fought back and raised her voice still higher, and of a sudden two policemen came running.

They saw a woman in the grasp of a man, and

that was sufficient. They seized Mr. Bowser on either side and wrenched and jammed and jerked him.

Then as he tried to explain they slammed him against the fence and bundled him around and poked him in the ribs, and then away they went, dragging him between them.

At the corner they were calling for the patrol wagon when Mr. Bowser's family butcher happened along and induced them to listen and finally decide on letting him go.

He limped back to the house. The moon still shed her glorious beams, but he saw her not. There was a mist hovering around the cat, waiting at the gate, but he gave it no heed.

With sighs and groans he drew himself up the steps and kicked open the door, and as he saw Mrs. Bowser in the hall he extended his arm until his finger almost touched her nose and hoarsely whispered:

"Would-be assassin, behold your work! You were coming to exult over my corpse. Make no excuses to me, for they won't go. To-morrow, woman, we separate forever, and I—I——"

He couldn't get out another word, and as he stood panting and gasping and gesturing went back up stairs, and the cat demurely followed.

The Bowsers had just finished dinner the other evening when a wagon delivered a keg at the basement door, and in reply to Mrs. Bowser's queries Mr. Bowser explained:

"That's all right. I had a man down the street make me a keg of Summer drink after my mother's old recipe."

"What sort of Summer drink?"

"Well, it isn't exactly root beer or ginger ale, but a sort of between. It's to purify the blood and act as a tonic during hot weather.

"Mother used to make it by the barrel, and doctors would send twenty miles to get a gallon for a patient. I happened to mention it to this man, and he knew just how to make it. It's a regular elixir, and I propose to drink about a gallon a day."

"I should say such stuff would be more apt to hurt than help you," observed Mrs. Bowser after awhile.

"Stuff! Stuff! Would you call champagne stuff?" he demanded. "It's a mighty funny thing that I can't make a move around this house without your finding fault.

"Any wife but you could see that I am all run down to a shadow and that I need a tonic of some sort. Because I haven't sat down and groaned and complained you think nothing ails me."

"Does anything ail you?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I simply have a torpid liver, a case of dyspepsia, giddiness, roaring in the ears, flying pains and half a dozen other things. Some men would have been in bed a month ago, but because I persist in staggering around you can't see but what I have the health of an ox."

"And this Summer drink will cure you?"

"Certainly. That's what I got it for. I'm not paying out \$3 for a keg of pond water. I hope you will have the good sense to take it at the same time, as I notice a dullness to your eyes and a languid air to your movements."

Mrs. Bowser said no more, and ten minutes later he rolled the keg down cellar and proceeded to tap it.

The taste was all he anticipated. Indeed, he smacked his lips over it and said to himself that it was a superior article to his mother's famous brew.

It had a certain twang to it which hers lacked, and this twang so captivated his palate that he imbibed a pint or more before going up stairs.

He carried another pint with him, expecting Mrs. Bowser to drink half of it, but as she declined even to taste it he sat down to his paper and sipped at intervals until the pitcher was empty.

About ten minutes after the last of the Summer drink had disappeared Mrs. Bowser was suddenly startled by a ha! ha! ha! and she looked up to find



Mr. Bowser gazing at her with a smile all over his face.

"What on earth is the matter with you?"

"Nothing—nothing 'tall," he replied with another laugh. "I was just thinking how nice you are. Yes, Mrs. Bowser, you are a mighty nice woman. Scuse me, will you, while I taste of that Summer drink and see if it's all right?"

"Is there anything wrong with you?" she asked as she looked hard at him.

"Nothing, my dear, 'cept that my dyspepsia is better. Yes, my dear, you are a nice woman—mighty nice. So's the cat—mighty nice cat."

He got up and went down for some more of the elixir, and when he returned at the end of ten minutes his face was flushed, his eyes sparkled, and he sat down in a reckless way and chuckled and said:

"Yesh, Mishus Bowser, you are a mighty nice woman. I'm glad I married you, I am."

"You—you have been drinking!" she gasped as she sternly regarded him.

"Me been zhrinking! Ha! ha! ha! Why, Mishus Bowser, how funny you talk! I just been zhrinking shome of zhat Summer drink; zhat's all. My mozzer used to make zhrink like that, you know. Poor mozzer!"

"Look here, Mr. Bowser, the man who prepared that keg for you must have put whisky or brandy

in it. You are as good as drunk. What a shame! Let me get you to bed at once."

Mr. Bowser was getting tight according to scale. He had begun with the "funny feeling." Her words took him out of that and into the next scale, and, assuming a look of great dignity, he demanded:

"Woman, be careful what you shay! How dare you even hint zhat I am intox-toxicated?"

"But you must be," she persisted.

"Never, woman—never! When you see Misher Bowser the worse for zhrink, you will shee the end of the world. Take back your vile impu-tation!"

"It is probably only a slight giddiness," she said as she schemed to get him up stairs.

"Zhat's all—just giddiness. I'm a giddy old thing, you shee. No, I won't come to bed. I want to sit up and shee the old year out."

Mrs. Bowser realized that she could do nothing until he had changed his mind, and she sat down to wait.

The cat came in from the back yard and took a long squint at Mr. Bowser, and as she saw how things were she purred a few bars of the air of "Dad's Got 'Em Again!" and took up a position on the lounge to await further developments. Mr. Bowser's next scale was that of the sorrowful.

All at once it flashed upon him that his mother was no more, and with tears running down his cheeks he wailed out:

"Mishus Bowser, how can you sit zhere like zhat when you know my poor mozzer is dead?"

She had no answer to make and, breaking into sobs, he continued:

"Poor, poor mozzer! I was her only shon. When I think zhat she is dead and gone——"

For five minutes Mr. Bowser gave way to his grief. When he raised his head he had passed on to the next step, and, drying his eyes, he flourished his arm and uttered a laugh and exclaimed:

"Whoopee! Mishus Bowser, I'm going to show you zhat I can make the best speech you ever heard."

"For mercy's sake, be quiet, or the cook will hear you!" she cautioned.

"What do we care for the cook? You shay I can't make a speech, but I shay I can! I shay I can! I shay——"

"Yes, yes, I know."

"I can make a speech shame as Patrick Henry. You just lemme git started once, and I'll bring down the house, Mishus Bowser——"

"Come, dear, it's time to go to bed," she interrupted.

The words sent him along to the last stage. A feeling of ugly obstinacy came over him, and, pounding on the table with his fist, he shouted:

"Mishus Bowser, you can't fool me!"

"No one is trying to fool you, dear."



"WHOOPE! MISHUS BOWSER, I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU  
THAT I CAN MAKE THE BEST SPEECH YOU EVER  
HEARD."



"No, shir, you can't do it! You want to get me up stairs and assassinate me, but you can't do it! I know you. You've tried to kill me fourteen different times, but you can't do it. I'm going to sit right here for three years, I am."

She made no reply, and after looking around in a vacant way for a minute he burst out with:

"No, I ain't either. I'm going down to the club."

He rose up and lurched out into the hall, and she followed and coaxed and entreated, but as she got hold of his hat he turned on her with:

"Woman, shay no more to me! Zhis is not a happy home, and I'm going down to the club. Leggo my arm!"

As he fumbled at the door some one came up the steps. As he opened it he collided with a man.

They grappled in the collision, swayed to and fro for a moment, and then Mr. Bowser fell backward into the hall and dragged the man with him.

There was a mix-up and yells of surprise, and then the stranger broke loose, and without waiting to pick up his hat he went down the steps and over the fence like a midnight shadow.

Mrs. Bowser closed the door and looked down upon the fallen.

He was snoring where he fell.

Descending to the cellar, she knocked the spigot out of the Summer drink keg, told the cook what

she would have for breakfast, and as she passed up stairs for the night she turned down the gas all around and left the slumberer to the gentle darkness of peaceful sleep.

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Mrs. Bowser happened to look out of a back window the other afternoon and was astonished to see Mr. Bowser in the alley along with a cow and two or three strange men.

The cow was evidently the subject of conversation, as Mr. Bowser walked round and round her and seemed to be sizing her up, and she was finally led into a stable, and the men disappeared.

Half an hour later Mr. Bowser entered the house, and to her query of why he happened to get home so early he replied:

"Oh, business was rather slack, you know, and so I thought I'd come home. Have we any book in the house relating to germs—I mean germs of typhoid, consumption, etc.?"

"I don't think we have."

"Well, never mind. I guess I'm pretty well posted as it is. If you have time, I'd like to talk with you for a few minutes. How much milk do you use per day?"

"Four quarts."

"Four quarts, eh? With an average of 600,000 germs to the quart, that is 2,400,000 germs to the gallon. By John, but when I see the cold figures



staring me in the face I can't repress a shiver! What on earth has preserved our lives I can't make out."

"What is it about germs?" she asked, with some anxiety.

"Simply this, my dear woman: You have in your system at the present moment probably 50,000,000 germs of typhoid and consumption. I have the same number or more. They are gamboling up and down through the veins and playing tag in the arteries, and we sit here as calm and placid as if the danger were a mile away. For the last seven or eight years we have been absorbing 600,000 germs per day, and why we were not removed from earth long ago is a positive miracle."

"You mean there are germs in milk?"

"Billions of them. Mrs. Bowser—billions. That is, they are in the milk you buy from the milkman. They come from the hands of the milkers and the cans."

"But they wouldn't be in the milk of your own cow?"

"Not a one—not if I took proper precautions. No; if we had our own cow we should not be walking around our own graves every hour of the day. We should have the purest of milk, the richest of cream, and what we pay in doctors' bills for six months would buy the cow and keep her the year round.

"I have it all figured out here. See? It has simply resolved itself down to this: Shall we fill up on germs every day in the year and suddenly develop typhoid or consumption, or shall we buy a cow of our own and live to be 85 or 90 years old? As to the germs, let me show you how they look. I will draw you two or three on a rough scale. Here they are. Of course they are enlarged."

He passed Mrs. Bowser the paper on which he had sketched two or three insects resembling grasshoppers, and after a long look she said:

"Well, I suppose you bought the cow of these two men I saw in the alley with you, but she looked to me like a poor creature."

"Oh, you were looking, eh? Well, yes, I bought the cow, and I am going to ask you to come out and see her. I think I know a thing or two about cows, and if this one isn't a good one I'll go out of the business. She's new milch, you know, and she gives an average of ten quarts at a milking. Just think of twenty quarts of rich milk per day—twenty quarts without a germ to be found!"

"But how can we make use of it?" she asked.

"We'll manage to drink half of it some way, and the rest goes to the poor. Kill two birds with one stone, you know. Come on and take a look at our anti-germ fountain."

Mrs. Bowser found a one-horned, wild-eyed cow standing in the stable. Her tail had been cut off,

her ribs stood out like barrel hoops, and the dogs had worried her ears. The animal looked more fit for hurdle racing or gate jumping than milking, and that was the opinion expressed of her.

"That shows how little you know about cows," replied Mr. Bowser. "Why, woman, do you know that her owner's first figure was \$60 and that I spent all of an hour in beating him down to \$40?"

"And you paid \$40 in cash for that—that thing?" she gasped.

"Certainly I did, and I know she's a bargain if there ever was one. Perhaps you came out here expecting to find something gold plated from head to heel. If you had ever seen a cow before, you'd know this one for an Alderney of purest blood. Look at that head, that back, that udder!"

"Yes, I'm looking!" sighed Mrs. Bowser. "I don't think she's much of a cow, but she may turn out all right after all. Doesn't she look wild to you?"

"Just a little, but you see she naturally regards us as strangers and is wondering what designs we have against her. Two or three days will see her looking as docile as a cat. She lost that missing horn while protecting her owner's child against an attack from a dog. Got love and affection as well as milk, you see."

"And who's to milk her?"

"That's my little job and no one else's. I'm go-

ing to get a jumper and a pair of overalls, and I shall be Farmer Bowser twice a day. I'll do the milking, and you'll play the dairymaid, and we'll snap our fingers at typhoid and consumption. Now, you run and get a pail, and we'll soon have our first ten quarts. No more tea, coffee or wine for us, but pure milk and all we can drink."

When Mrs. Bowser returned with the pail, she felt to caution Mr. Bowser against that wildness of the eyes, but with a laugh he removed his coat and cuffs and made ready.

Once upon a time he had seen a man milk a cow, and the late owner of this particular bovine had spent ten minutes in posting him. He therefore felt a supreme confidence in himself and naturally neglected several little signs and tokens that made Mrs. Bowser doubtful.

"By John, but this is homelike!" he said as he drew up the box. "If we only had a pig squealing in a pen and a few hens cackling around, it would be——"

The cow humped up her back in a threatening way, and Mrs. Bowser called out in alarm.

"She just humped a fly off her back," said Mr. Bowser as he took hold again. "Of course we've got to get used to each other. It won't be three days before——"

There were a hump and a jump this time, accom-

panied by a bellow, and before Mr. Bowser could let go, the pail was kicked out of his hand.

He started to fall back, but the cow's leg swung around, and her hoof found his body and sent him rolling over the floor, while Mrs. Bowser yelled at the top of her voice.

There were other humps and kicks and bellows, and then the "new milch" charged the alley door like a bull going for a haystack. There was a crash and a smash and a cloud of splinters, and the cow and the door went down the alley together.

"Are you dead?" asked Mrs. Bowser as she went over to where the anti-germist was lying on the floor.

Mr. Bowser slowly sat up, with a vacant expression on his face, and stared around.

"This is the twentieth century, and you have bought a new milch cow," she continued, hoping to bring his memory back.

It returned. He drew himself up and looked around him, and when his eyes finally lighted upon her he pointed to the open doorway and hoarsely whispered:

"Wo-woman, retire! Get out! Begone! I—I will see you later on and agree upon the amount of the alimony!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### HE MAKES A LITTLE JOURNEY.

Mr. Bowser had one of his "good streaks" on, and when he came home and found Mrs. Bowser in tears and a telegram that her mother was very ill, he neither kicked the cat nor charged reckless mismanagement of household affairs. On the contrary, he expressed his sympathy and magnanimously added:

"She's my mother-in-law, of course, and she never visits us except to make things uncomfortable for me, but I'll forgive her. I'll not only forgive her, but as you are not feeling well I'll run up to Concord and see just how she is and chirk her up all I can."

"You—you don't mean it!" gasped Mrs. Bowser, in the greatest astonishment.

"Why, of course I do. Just throw a few things in the satchel for me and I'll take the night train up. I haven't been out of town for a year, and I shall rather enjoy a short trip."

"But I'm afraid you can't sleep on the sleeping car."

"I'll sleep like a top. It's all settled that I go."

And two hours later Mr. Bowser was a passenger aboard the night train enjoying the feeling that a good action always brings. Every berth in his sleeper was taken, and there were several children aboard. He made friends with two or three from the start, and before the train had gone fifty miles he was gratified at hearing one mother say to another:

"Now, there's a man who makes his home and his whole neighborhood happy. I don't believe that anything ever puts him out, or that he has a cross word for anybody."

Mr. Bowser is in the habit of tumbling into bed, rolling over on his back and falling to sleep within five minutes. As soon as he strikes his bed the family cat, rats and mice walk about on tiptoe and the grocery wagons, butcher carts and fire engines never pass his house if it can be avoided. The small boy who would dare utter one "coo'ee!" in front of his house after ten o'clock at night would realize that he was taking his life in his hands. He got into his berth in the sleeper expecting the usual results to follow, but somewhat to his surprise they didn't. As is usually the case two or three men were not yet ready to turn in, and they began discussing politics. Every word was audible from end to end of the car. For about ten minutes Mr. Bowser wondered over their impudence. For five more



he was amazed at their disregard for the rights of others. Then he jumped to the conclusion that it was a personal matter, and he called the porter and said:

"This is a sleeping car. I have gone to bed to sleep. Those men must either shut up or get out."

"Yes, sah," replied the porter, and he went off about his business instead of conveying the message. He had been on a sleeping car long enough to know that twenty-three people had no rights in case the twenty-fourth didn't feel sleepy. The discussion continued for ten minutes. Then Mr. Bowser poked his head out between the curtains and exclaimed:

"Are you fellows going to keep that chatter up all night! How does it happen that you didn't take the hog train?"

There was an exchange of courtesies. The language was vigorous. Mr. Bowser was derided and defied, but his dander was up and he called the porter and conductor and insisted so strenuously on his rights that the political discussion came to an end.

"By the horn spoon, but that's got to stop!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser as he sat up and poked his head out. "Here—you over there—stop that infernal bazoo of yours! Porter, **come here** and rouse up that critter across the way."

The "critter" was roused. He got in two more

snores and three long drawn groans before the dig in the ribs broke in on his slumbers. Then he indignantly demanded to know who had dared to disturb him.

"You were snoring," explained Mr. Bowser.

"Well, what of it? Is it any business of yours?"

"You bet it is. If you want to make a hog of yourself get off and take a stock train!"

The jaw lasted ten minutes, and as two-thirds of the passengers sided with Mr. Bowser, and as the snores diminished to sighs and gasps, he felt that the victory was his. This time quietness brought sleep, but sleep only lasted forty winks. The wail of a child brought Mr. Bowser's eyes open; a second wail sat him up, and a third caused him to exclaim:

"Have I got to murder some one in this car before I can get an hour's sleep! Where's the mother of that young 'un that she don't stop his noise!"

"My little boy seems to be ill," replied a female voice.

"Seems to be ill! Don't you know whether he is or not? If he's sick get up and attend to him. If he's only dreaming give him a cuff and wake him up. By Jackson, but why the law allows a woman to gad about the country with a child I can't understand."

"And I thought he was such a nice, good-nat-

ured old man!" murmured the woman as she petted and hushed the child to sleep again.

This time there was no sleep for Mr. Bowser. He had got so mad that his eyes wouldn't close, and he tumbled around and wished he was home so that he could say something to make Mrs. Bowser feel bad. He was ready for another fracas when the train drew up at a station. He heard people talking, baggage trucks rumbling and a man passing along and striking the wheels with a hammer. Up on end he came and called to the porter, and when the man had arrived he was accosted with:

"What in the name of the ten tribes has happened now! What are all those people gabbing about?"

"It's people at the depot, sah," was the reply.

"Yes, but are the people at the depot allowed to whoop and chatter and scream and wake up every sleeper in the cars? Beautifully managed road this! What's that rumbling and banging and crashing?"

"Loadin' up de baggage."

"Oh, it is! In order to load up a few old trunks they must bustle and bang and bump and stand everybody's hair up! I'd like to talk to the manager of this road about five minutes. And what's that dunderhead pounding on the wheels for?"

"Testin' 'em, sah."

"Well, I'd like to test him! By smoke, but the people of the United States are the biggest fools

on earth to put up with such impositions! I'll sue somebody to-morrow for \$50,000 damages."

There was yet another cause to kick. The train hadn't left the station ten miles behind when there was a bump on the floor of the car, followed by a yell. One of the children had fallen out of bed.

"In the name of mercy what's that!" almost howled Mr. Bowser, as the curtains parted again.

"Look here, old man," answered a masculine voice, "you seem worried. Why don't you shut up and go to sleep?"

"Because I've got to murder seven or eight people before I'll be allowed to go to sleep. And don't you tell me to shut up!"

The man put his head out and gazed at Mr. Bowser. Then he advised him to eat a bran mash, soak his head and hang on to his chin. Mr. Bowser replied in kind, and added a threat to lick his fellow passenger if he had to pursue him around the globe to find the occasion. The whole car was in a row before the conductor could be brought in as a peacemaker, and Mr. Bowser was one of the half dozen who dressed and sat up for the next three hours and glared around him and muttered under his breath. At four o'clock in the afternoon he entered his own house and flung his satchel on the floor.

"How did you get home so soon?" asked Mrs.

Bowser in alarm. "And is mother better or worse?"

"I didn't get to Concord," he replied.

"You didn't? Then she is dead! You got a telegram!"

"I got nothing. The infernal old railroad undertook to bulldoze me around and deprive me of my rights and I wouldn't stand it. I got off at a junction and took the first train back, and I'll be hanged if I don't see a lawyer to-morrow and start about four hundred damage suits."

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It was after dinner, but instead of sitting down to his evening paper and cigar Mr. Bowser was prowling around the lower part of the house. Mrs. Bowser realized that "something was up," but she maintained silence until at length he paused before her and said:

"Last night while you were playing the piano I noticed that it was sadly out of tune. You must have heard some of the keys make a sort of ur-ur-ur as you struck them."

"I heard nothing of the sort!" promptly replied Mrs. Bowser, as a dim idea of what he was up to flashed across her mind. "The piano was tuned only a month ago, and there are no ur-ur-urs about it."

"But I insist that there are," continued Mr. Bowser. "I have a quick ear, and I say that no less

than seven different keys had the sound of an egg beater at work. It may have been tuned a month ago, but by whom?"

"By a first-class tuner."

"That is, he of course claimed to be first-class and charged you \$3 or \$4, but how do you know he wasn't a carpenter or blacksmith? There's a piano which cost me \$600. It is going to rack and ruin for the need of a little overhauling. To get a competent man up here will cost \$50, whereas——"

"Whereas you can do the work in an hour yourself," finished Mrs. Bowser. "Well, now, you let that piano alone! You know no more about the works of a piano than I do about the kitchen of the czar of Russia. If there's anything to be done, I'll get a man up here."

"Madam," said Mr. Bowser, as he stood before her with his hands clasped under his coattails, "there is an ur-ur-ur to that piano. It is out of repair; it is going to ruin. I can overhaul it in one hour and save \$50. It will be a pleasure to me to do the work, and I also feel it my duty to save the money which would have to be otherwise paid out. I shall proceed to tune."

"But you'll only destroy it. If you feel that you must tinker away at something, why don't you take the lawn mower, the gas meter or that old shotgun in the garret?"

"I do not ask you to remain in the room during the tuning process. You can put on your hat and take a walk, or you can go up to your room and read a novel. When I have restored the tone to its original volume and sweetness, I will call you."

"But I beg of you to—to——"

Mr. Bowser waved his hand to signify that nothing on the face of the earth could turn him aside, and as Mrs. Bowser went up stairs with tears in her eyes he got his tool box and peeled off his coat and jacket to begin work. He met with an adventure at the very outset. He wanted room to work on all sides of the piano, and he therefore got behind it to push it out into the middle of the floor. He was heaving away with his shoulder against the case when his foot slipped on the carpet and he went down and rolled over with the weight of an elephant. He fetched up against a chair and knocked that over, and he was still lying on his back when Mrs. Bowser came half way down stairs to call out:

"I thought the walls were falling in! What are you doing on your back on the floor?"

"I wanted to see the underside of the piano," he replied as he got up. "Should I find myself in need of your assistance I will call you."

As tools for piano tuning Mr. Bowser had a hammer, a hatchet, a tack puller, a corkscrew, a screw-driver and a monkey wrench. As he folded back



the cover he saw the inside of a piano for the first time in his life. He had taken only one glance when he walked to the foot of the stairs and called to Mrs. Bowser:

"No wonder there was an ur-ur-ur when you hit some of the keys! What d'you 'spose your first-class piano tuner left among the wires?"

"He couldn't have left any of his tools?" she queried.

"No tools, but half a dozen strips of red flannel. He even wove them in among the strings. That's probably where my missing flannel shirt went to. He was probably some man from a woolen mill."

"Why, those strips are always put in," protested Mrs. Bowser. "I think the idea is to soften the sound."

"Well, I don't. I think the idea is to attract rats and mice, and out they come."

When Mr. Bowser had finished pulling out the "rags," he very quickly discovered the method of tightening the strings. With one hand he fitted the monkey wrench to turn the keys, and with the other he started a tum-tum-tum on the keys, as he had once or twice seen a regular tuner do. He couldn't exactly decide whether all the strings ought to be tightened or loosened and so he took a middle course and tightened half and loosened half. The effect wasn't exactly magical; it was worse. Some of the keys piped and sobbed, and there were

others which produced sounds as of a saw trying to eat its way into a crowbar.

"For the land's sake, but what are you doing now?" called Mrs. Bowser after three or four minutes.

"Saving a piano from rack and ruin," replied Mr. Bowser as two chills tried to gallop up and down his spine at the same time."

He hadn't quite hit it. He grudgingly admitted the fact to himself and then began anew. In a dim, uncertain way he seemed to remember something about a "pitch" in connection with tuning. He couldn't possibly recall whether it was high pitch, but he wasn't the man to hesitate. He began humming the air of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and keeping up the tum-tum on the keys. After awhile he found a sound to agree with his hum, and he took that for a rallying point. It was what he called a so-so pitch, and after half an hour of keying up and keying down he got three keys which appeared to agree that some sort of a girl had been left behind somebody. The other strings were obstinate. They wanted to play "Sally Waters," "The Sweet By and By" or "Yankee Doodle," and every five minutes Mrs. Bowser kept calling down to know if a strange cat had got into the house or if Mr. Bowser had got an attack of colic.

He finally refused to answer her, but with teeth shut hard and a glare in his eyes he started out to



HE BEGAN HUMMING THE AIR, "THE GIRL  
I LEFT BEHIND ME."



bring those strings into harmony or bust the box. He tightened ten, one after another, until they set up a humming, and then he mopped his brow and started to tum-tum the keys. There were ten sounds to bring out the gooseflesh, but scarcely had the first shudder passed over Mr. Bowser when the wires began to snap. The end of the first one tickled his ear, the second one curled his hair and the third just brushed his chin. He was moving away when four went at once, and one of them had business with his nose. Mrs. Bowser heard a yell and a sit down, and she came flying down stairs to find Mr. Bowser sitting against the wall with his nose in his hand. It was bleeding like a cider barrel with the bung out, and the skin had been peeled from end to base. His eyes were also weeping large tears, and his bald head had a welt across it.

"Well, you've tuned the piano!" said Mrs. Bowser as she looked down upon him.

"Who—who threw a cat in my face?" he asked as he realized her presence.

"It's a wonder you didn't say I did," she answered, "and then go and threaten a divorce and all that. It was one of the wires that struck you, and you'll want court-plaster on that nose for a month."

"Wo-man—wo"—he began, but she stopped him with a gesture and said:

"It will cost \$25 or \$30 to have that piano fixed, but it shall be done to-morrow! You've got to the end of your tune, and now go up stairs and let me see how nearly killed you are!"

Mr. Bowser obeyed without a protest. More than that, he never said a word while she was criss-crossing his nose with six strips of plaster. It was only after he was in bed that he growled under his breath:

"It was a put-up job to assassinate me, and you bet your life I'll make it cost somebody mighty dear!"

---

"Would you mind if we have breakfast half an hour earlier than usual?" asked Mrs. Bowser the other evening as Mr. Bowser got seated with his cigar and newspaper.

"I guess not. But why?" he queried in reply.

"Well, I thought I'd begin house-cleaning to-morrow. I've got two women and a man coming to help me, and I want to get an early start."

"Two women and a man, eh?" he mused as he laid down his paper. "Two women and a man, and it will take you a month."

"Oh, no; I hope to get through in three days."

"In other words, Mrs. Bowser, this house is to be upset from cellar to garret for the next three days in order that a man and two women may loaf around and charge you \$3 a day apiece for it.

That's your way exactly. By gum, but I don't believe there's another woman like you on earth!"

"Haven't I got to clean house?" she asked.

"Yes, things have got to be tumbled over once a year, I suppose, but I don't propose to be upset for three or four days nor pay out \$50 in cash. What house-cleaning is wanted around here can be done in one hour by the clock, and I'm the person to do it. I want exercise to work off about three pounds of superfluous flesh. I'll change my clothes and be ready in five minutes."

"But you can't clean house!" pleaded Mrs. Bowser, as she barred his way up stairs. "Just let it go. I've thought of another plan. I'll do it, one room at a time, and all by myself."

"What's the matter that I can't clean house? You watch my smoke and see. We won't have any puttering around'about it. There's no use for you to spend a week over what I can do in an hour. I'll take the parlor first, and you needn't worry."

Mrs. Bowser dropped into a chair with a groan, and Mr. Bowser jumped into an old suit and was down stairs with the stepladder in ten minutes. The family cat came up from the kitchen and saw him in his shirt sleeves and a grim look on his face, and she quietly slipped under the lounge to be clear of the shower when the splinters began to fly.

"A man and two women, eh? Three days and



\$50 expense to clean a house! Kindly keep track of my motions."

And with five twists and a yank Mr. Bowser had the furniture out of the parlor into the sitting room. The casters chattered and the dust flew, and Mrs. Bowser dodged the dancing chairs and made her way up stairs. There were pictures and wall ornaments to come down. It would have taken Mrs. Bowser half a day to remove them, but the time consumed by Mr. Bowser was a little short of twelve minutes. That was a saving of eleven hours and forty-eight minutes to begin with. In taking the pictures down he grabbed them by the corners and gave a flit and a twist and snapped wires or hooks and started the molding from the wall, but he was working against time. As the last picture came down the corner struck and knocked the nose off of a marble bust of Shakespeare, and Mrs. Bowser called down to know what had happened.

"Nothing—nothing 'tall," replied Mr. Bowser as he picked up the nose and flung it out of the window. "You just keep quiet, and I'll show you how to do spring house-cleaning. I don't think we'll have to put breakfast ahead of the usual time."

In carrying the ornaments into the sitting room he struck a vase against a chair and shivered it, but the shiver didn't reach Mrs. Bowser, and he had



THE CASTORS CHIRRUPED AND THE DUST FLEW.



nothing to complain of. The cat purred and grinned as she looked out from her lair. Things were getting interesting. They got more interesting as Mr. Bowser loaded up with rugs and came staggering in to trip over his own feet and come down to his knees and roll over on the broad of his back.

"I—I thought you had gone through the cellar!" said Mrs. Bowser as she came hurrying down stairs.

"And suppose I had!" he demanded as he struggled up. "I'm bossing this job, and if I wanted to break through the floor that's my business. You see what I've accomplished, don't you? In twenty-two minutes I've done more house-cleaning than you and your crowd could have accomplished in three days. Don't come interfering. I know my gait."

The rooms having been cleared of furniture, the next thing in order was to take up the carpet. Some folks waste time by prying out the tacks, but there is another way, and Mr. Bowser caught on at once. Having got a corner loosened, he seized the border in both hands and heaved and tugged, and there was a rip, rip, rip! all along the baseboard. All he had to do was to walk around the room and heave away. Some men would have folded the carpet over and rolled it up when it was free from the floor, but Mr. Bowser didn't. He drew a long breath, wiped the sweat out of his eyes and rushed

the carpet together in a heap to resemble a small haystack. As a sort of grand wind-up and to reduce the height of the pile he fell on it. Two yells and a whoop followed, and the sounds jumped the cat from under the lounge and brought Mrs. Bowser down stairs on wings. He hadn't meant to yell when he fell foul of the tacks and imagined for a minute that he had kicked over a bumble-bee's nest, but he was taken by surprise. However, Mrs. Bowser found him on his feet and struggling to preserve a calm and careless demeanor, and she could only remark:

"It must have been cats fighting in the back yard. I see you've got the carpet up. The next thing is to dust the ceiling. I'll get you a feather duster."

When she had handed him the duster and disappeared, Mr. Bowser advanced and kicked that heap of carpet about forty times as hard as he could swing his leg. A hundred tacks had jabbed into him and left smarting wounds, but he felt easier after the kicking. All that was needed now to finish up was to use the duster. He carried the step-ladder over to a corner and mounted it and began work, and as he worked he chuckled. Mrs. Bowser had figured on standing the house on its head for two or three weeks, but he had got the best of her. Breakfast and dinner would be served at the usual hours, and he wouldn't have to climb over scrub

brooms, mop sticks and pails of water to get in or out of the house. He was using the duster about as a laborer uses a crowbar and flattering himself that the house would soon go to rack without him when some movement caused the foot of the ladder to slip. Mr. Bowser let fall the duster and grabbed something, but it was too late. He felt himself going, and he yelled "Murder!" He heard the cat pattering in over the bare floor, and he heard Mrs. Bowser on the stairs, and then he landed somewhere and saw stars and suns and moons dancing before his eyes, and the sound of many wheels going around was in his ears. He wasn't dead. He hadn't even broken a leg. He opened his eyes to find his head and shoulders on the floor and his feet slanting up on the haystack of a carpet. As he lay thus for a moment he heard the cook asking in an awed voice:

"Is he dead at last?"

And Mrs. Bowser's voice was also plain as she answered:

"I don't think so. I think he turned over twice and struck on his back. Keep the cat away while I fan him."

Then Mr. Bowser lost sight of stars and suns and moons, and the sound of wheels died away, and he returned to consciousness and the United States. He took one leg down at a time and then slowly and with becoming dignity stood up and leaned

against the wall. The cook withdrew, and the cat stalked away, and Mrs. Bowser was left face to face with whatever might come. It was not long coming.

"I see; I understand!" whispered Mr. Bowser as he nodded his head.

"You—you had a fall."

"Yes, attempted assassination! Who sneaked down here and kicked that stepladder from under me? Who, I say, who, who, who?" And, pointing the accusing finger of justice at Mrs. Bowser, he slowly and laboriously climbed his way up stairs and left her with her conscience.

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There was a sort of general "goneness" in Mr. Bowser when he got home the other evening. He dragged his legs, humped his shoulders and had a far-away look in his eyes. At the dinner table he heaved a sigh between every mouthful, and Mrs. Bowser was finally forced to inquire:

"Do you think you need some quinine to break up your cold?"

"I have no cold," he mournfully replied.

She knew it. She further knew that nothing whatever ailed him physically, but that he was "putting on" in order to spring some new fad on her. It wouldn't develop until after dinner, and she therefore held her peace and waited. When the meal had been finished Mr. Bowser lighted his



cigar and took up the evening paper, but after smoking and reading for ten minutes he uttered a groan and stretched out on the lounge.

"You—you didn't get flung off the street car or anything?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

"No."

"It's queer what ails you. You were all right when you went away this morning."

"That is, I seemed to be all right," he said after a long silence and more groans.

"But why didn't you say something about it if anything was wrong?"

"Mrs. Bowser," he said, as he sat up and counterfeited a shudder, "men go on suffering for years and make no sign. I have known for months and months that I was threatened with consumption, but was determined not to say anything about it until forced to. I had hoped to go on to the end, but——"

"That's all nonsense!" she indignantly exclaimed. "You've got lungs on you like a whale, and if any one has made you believe you have the faintest sign of consumption he's a fraud!"

"Look here, woman!" said Mr. Bowser, as he got off the lounge and stood before her, "how do you come to know whether my lungs are all right or not?"

"Why should anything be wrong with them?" she asked in reply.

"Why? Why? Because I have inhaled the germs of consumption while traveling to and fro, and they are already at work on the upper part of my right lung. There's a pain there as if some one was drawing a piece of barbed wire back and forth. It has got to be attended to at once. The germs have got to be driven out forthwith or I shall never see snow fly again."

"And of course you have a cure?"

"I have. I have been quietly looking for a cure for the last two months, and I have found it at last. I suppose you will be disappointed that I am not to shuffle off, but I propose to live just as long as I can."

"Well, you will go ahead, I suppose," she said as she turned away. "In the last six months you have swallowed stuff to cure asthma, liver complaint, palsy, rheumatism, spinal meningitis and the Lord knows what else, and you might as well add consumption. What is the remedy?"

"None of your business! Six times in six months have I drawn myself back from the grave by taking some remedy in time, and each time you have seen fit to be merry and sarcastic at my expense. You can now go to pot! What I have got or how I shall cure myself is nothing to you."

"But you let people impose upon you so often," she persisted.

"I do, eh?" he shouted, as he drew himself up.

"Never! Never! We have been married twelve years or more, and if you can point to one single instance where I have been gulled out of one single penny I'll buy you a \$20 dress. I let people work me for a soft snap! That shows all you know about it. I'm called the hardest man to work in the whole State. I turn down fifty fakirs per week the year 'round. The idea that I let people swindle me!"

Mrs. Bowser said no more. He had come home believing that he had the germs of consumption, and he was bound to try the remedy he had brought with him. He soon made known what it was. It was a two-pound box of what he had been told was medicated sea salt, to be used in a hot bath, and he took it down to the kitchen to open it. The cook naturally became interested, and, somehow, in shuffling things around Mr. Bowser got hold of and opened a box of chloride of lime which had been bought for the kitchen sink. With this in hand he started the hot water running in the bathtub. Mrs. Bowser appeared at the foot of the stairs and asked if he needed any assistance, and he growled in reply:

"Never you mind about assistance! You'd better sit by the front door and see that no one comes in to gull me. I'm such a soft snap, you know, that I ought to have a guardian appointed!"

And when she had withdrawn and he had emp-

tied the contents of the box into the bathtub he continued to himself:

"This pitching into me every three times a week has got to come to a stop. If I'm not the boss of this roost I'd better find out who is. I have put it rather strong about that lung of mine, but prevention is better than cure. There may be germs there, and if so I'll get the start of them."

When Mr. Bowser was ready for the tub he observed that the water bubbled and foamed and had a greasy look, but of course that was the action of the consumption powders he had paid \$3 for. The feel of the water as he got in could also be laid to the same thing. He had been splashing around for two or three minutes when he became aware of a burning sensation. As he scooped up the water and let it run down over his head he found his eyes smarting as if rubbed with alcohol, and a spot on his shin-bone where the skin had been rubbed off felt like dog's teeth fastened into his leg.

"I—I've got to stand it if I expect to get any good of it!" he groaned as he huddled down at the bottom of the tub, but from heels to ears he began to prickle and burn in a way that made him grit his teeth and weep generous tears. He was wondering how the lung-germs liked it, and how many would be killed stone-dead in five minutes more, when the cook rushed up stairs to Mrs. Bowser with a yell. A minute later Mrs. Bowser was flying

up the other stairs, and as she reached the bathroom door and began pounding on it she shouted:

"Mr. Bowser, are you in the bathtub?"

"Of course I'm in the bathtub," he answered.

"And did you empty that box of germ-killer into the water?"

"Certainly."

"Then for Heaven's sake get out of the water as quick as you can! You've made a terrible mistake. You left the germ-killer down in the kitchen and brought up a box of chloride of lime!"

Through the closed door she heard an ejaculation, followed by just such a splashing and kicking as a whale would make if running his head against a rock, and the house shook to its foundations as Mr. Bowser rolled over the edge of the tub on to the floor.

"Are you flayed alive?" she anxiously demanded.

"Woman, g'way from me—g'long away!" he shouted back. "You and the cook put up this job to take my life, but in my dying agonies I'll get even with you!"

Mr. Bowser was a parboiled man. He had the vivid color of a freshly-boiled lobster, and every inch of him burned and smarted. There was also a greasy feeling which the towels could not rub away, and he rubbed and swore in vain. Mrs. Bowser expected him to come down stairs with a rush and to shout lawyers and divorce, and all that of

her, but he didn't show up. Hours passed, and when she finally turned out the lights and went up to bed he was under the blankets and fast asleep.

"Did any germs get away?" she asked as she bent over his red and shiny face and noticed that his nose had begun to peel.

But he heaved a long-drawn sigh and whispered a cuss-word and slept on.

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"Well, by George!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he sat reading his paper the other evening, "but they served that man just right!"

"What is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"Man and wife in Indiana sat down to a game of poker at their own fireside, and because she won a dollar of him he broke her neck. The people gathered and pulled him up to a limb, and the coroner wouldn't even hold an inquest on the body. Isn't it queer how some husbands act?"

"Y-yes," replied Mrs. Bowser, looking anxiously around for an excuse to leave the room.

"The idea that he should break her neck because she held the best hand! Hanging was too good for him. I was wishing only this afternoon that you knew how to play poker."

"I—I do," replied Mrs. Bowser, though she bit her tongue the next instant for her foolishness.

"You do! Why, I didn't suppose you ever saw a poker chip. Been learning to gamble without

dropping me a hint, eh? Just laying low to give me a surprise party?"

Mrs. Bowser should never have admitted that she had even heard of the game of poker. There had been a family row because she beat Mr. Bowser at fox and geese—another because she got the best of him at checkers—a regular riot because she laid him out at euchre. She should have gone up stairs or down stairs for ten minutes and let the matter pass out of his mind. While she was lamenting her bad diplomacy Mr. Bowser got up, with a beaming smile on his face, and exclaimed:

"Well, what luck! I've got a pack of cards and a box of poker chips on the hall tree. I thought I might drop over and beat Taylor out of \$15 or \$20, but as I came in he said he wouldn't be home this evening. We'll just have a little game all by ourselves."

"I—don't feel well this evening!" stammered Mrs. Bowser.

"O-ho! I see! Afraid to play against me, eh? That little excuse won't go down, however. You said you knew how to play poker, and so we will have a game. Clear off the table and get ready."

"Really, Mr. Bowser, but my head——"

"Your head is all right, and pretty near level. I don't expect you can play for shucks, but we'll have a little fun out of it."

It was now too late for Mrs. Bowser to get out



of it, unless the house caught fire, and they drew up to the table, each took a dollar's worth of chips, and, as Mr. Bowser dealt the cards, he asked:

"Shall we have any limit on this game?"

"I don't care," she replied.

"Very well. We can bet the extent of our pile. Ante up a blue chip, and we'll make 'em all jack-pots. You must have jacks or better to open on. Can you open?"

"I can."

"You can, eh? That's rather curious. Want three cards, eh? And I'll take one. What do you bet?"

"Two blue chips."

"You do, eh? Didn't you see that I drew only one card? Aren't you player enough to know that I held up a four flush or straight or two pairs? This is no baby game, Mrs. Bowser?"

"I'll raise it four blue chips!" she replied.

"Well," he said, after glancing at her for half a minute. "You can take the pot, but look out for me! I could have raked in the coin, but I'll wait and drop you with a cold thud. I pass."

"I can open it again," she said.

"You can? Well, it takes a fool for luck, they say. I want two cards this time. Ah-ha! Mrs. Bowser, I bet five blue chips!"

"And I raise you my pile."

"What! You raise me?" he shouted. "Couldn't



"HOLD ON, MR. BOWSER—I HAVE A FULL HOUSE—SEE?"

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
URBANA

you tell by my draw that I held up threes, and isn't it likely that I caught one more of the same kind? You don't seem to know the game!"

"Nevertheless, I raise you," she said.

"But how can you do it? You don't think you are playing jackstraws, do you? As you are a woman, I'll give you a chance to back down—just this one chance."

"I don't want it."

"Then take the consequences! There's my hand—three aces! I rake in——"

"Hold on. Mr. Bowser—I have a full house—see!"

"Woman!" he exclaimed in a whisper, as he laid down the cards, "do you realize what you are doing? Even though this is a family game, with no money up, you ought to be ashamed to cheat."

"Why—how did I cheat?" she asked.

"Never you mind, but if you do it again this game will cut short off. You never could have got that hand in this living world without skull duggery. I'll take another dollar's worth of chips and go on, but I want honest playing. It's my deal. What do you do?"

"I pass."

"But I don't. Drawing to fill a flush, are you? Well, I'll take three and make a full house of it. Ah-um! Now look out for me, I bet four chips."

"I see 'em and raise you four more."

"What, you raise me when you ought to know that I've got a full house? You can't do it, Mrs. Bowser—you can't do it."

"How do I know that you've got a full house?"

"How do you know that this world is round instead of flat? You raise me, do you? Well, I see the raise and bet the rest of my pile. If you don't know the game you must take the consequences."

"I call you, Mr. Bowser."

"You do? How can you call me?"

"It's the game, of course. Let's see your hand."

"Never, Mrs. Bowser—never! You have no right to call a full house!"

"But I've got four aces!"

"Four aces! four aces! Mrs. Bowser, you hooked at least three of 'em out of the pack when I turned my head to look at the cat!"

"How foolish, Mr. Bowser! I simply had luck. Perhaps luck will come to you this time. What's the matter?"

"There is nothing the matter, Mrs. Bowser," he said, as he pushed back and rose up, "nothing at all! I simply sit down in my own house to play poker with my own wife. She resorts to gambling tactics to beat me. It remains for me to put on my hat and——"

"Don't be foolish, Mr. Bowser!"

"And go down to the club and finish the game. I may not return home until near morning, and——"

“How like a boy!”

“And I wish you good evening, Mrs. Bowser, and you may call the cook up stairs and cheat and lie and deceive and beat her out of a month’s wages!”

## CHAPTER VII.

### MR. BOWSER EXERCISES HIS WILL-POWER.

Mr. Bowser came home to dinner the other night looking a good deal worried, but all of Mrs. Bowser's inquiries as to what had happened were put aside until dinner was finished. Then he made a considerable ado about pulling out his cigar case and breaking up three or four cigars and tossing them out of the back window. As he had been an inveterate smoker for fifteen years, and as he had treated the advice of friends and the family doctor with contempt, Mrs. Bowser had a right to feel a good deal of surprise at his action. As she looked at him in an inquiring way he crossed his hands under his coattails and fixed a stern gaze upon her and said:

"Mrs. Bowser, you behold before you a man of will power."

"You have decided to stop smoking?" she queried.

"I have. That is, I shall break off for a year and give my system a chance to throw off the nico-





"MRS. BOWSER, YOU BEHOLD BEFORE YOU A MAN OF  
WILL POWER."

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tine. After thinking the matter over I have fully and firmly decided. It was smoking that ailed me all the time, but I was reluctant to admit it. It has given me about nine different diseases, but if I stop short and drink plenty of buttermilk I am in hopes to restore my health. Have you no congratulations?"

"Why, I think it a good idea, of course," she replied, as she remembered fifty other occasions when he had come to the same decision. "Yes, it will be a good thing for you if you can only go through with it."

"If I can only!" he indignantly repeated. "Of course I can go through with it. All that is needed is the exercise of a little will power. I shall hanker for a smoke now and then, but all I've got to do is to stand firm. I should despise myself if I felt that I couldn't get the better of a habit."

Mrs. Bowser looked anxious, and the cat came up the basement stairs with a grin on her face, while Mr. Bowser sat down to his newspaper. He kept quiet for five minutes. Then he rose up with the remark:

"You bet I can stop smoking! If I thought I couldn't, I'd go and hang myself! However, as I don't want any sudden shock to my nervous system I think I'd better——"

"You'd better smoke half a cigar?" suggested Mrs. Bowser with a smile.

"Never! Do you take me for a fishworm? I have quit smoking for a year, and that settles it. I was thinking, however, that I might chew cloves or spice or something to divert my thoughts."

He went down to the pantry and got a handful of roasted coffee berries and then sat down for awhile on the basement stairs to call himself names for throwing away three ten-cent cigars instead of laying them up somewhere. The cat came and sat down beside him and plainly showed her sympathy, but at the end of five minutes he gave her a slap and ascended to the sitting room to announce that he was going over to the drug store for licorice root. He was about to put on his hat when he noticed a smile on Mrs. Bowser's face, and he turned on her with:

"Oh, you are grinning, are you? You think it will turn out as it has before, but I'll show you to the contrary. If I was told that my life depended on my smoking, I wouldn't take a single puff. After living with me another fifteen years perhaps you'll find out that I'm a man of my word."

"I have always known that you had great will power," she quietly replied.

"You bet I have, and I'll give you a surprise over this smoking business. They say that if you chew licorice root it will take away the longing, but let her long and be durned!"

During the next hour Mr. Bowser hunted the

pantry for spice, cinnamon, nutmeg and other things, and he even went so far as to sprinkle a piece of raw cabbage with cayenne pepper and shed a liberal supply of tears as he worried it down. The consolation in each instance was brief. As Mrs. Bowser watched him prowling around she knew what would happen sooner or later, but she was powerless to avert it. As he paced back and forth, his nerves on edge for a smoke, he suddenly discovered a hairpin on the floor. It was a cheap, steel hairpin, costing about a fifth of a cent, but it was enough to serve his purpose.

"Woman, is it any wonder that we are going to the poorhouse on the gallop?" he demanded as he picked up the pin and held it out toward her with flushed face.

"It dropped out of my hair," she replied, as she took it and found a place for it.

"Certainly it did, and if I hadn't discovered it it would have gone into the ash barrel where millions more have preceded. Is it any wonder I can't get a dollar ahead of the game!"

"Please don't make such a fuss about one cheap little hairpin. If I lost a thousand a year you wouldn't be a dollar out of pocket."

"It's not the cost of that hairpin, but the principle of the thing. A wife who will waste hairpins will waste clothing and fuel and gas and provisions. If I wanted proof that you were a reckless, extrava-

gant wife, that hairpin would be living evidence. I have borne and borne, but I tell you the limit has been reached."

"If you had been smoking you wouldn't have noticed such an insignificant trifle," she said as he walked up and down, and the cat took good care to keep out of his way.

"No, of course not!" he shouted. "If my senses had been steeped in nicotine my eyes would have been blinded to your extravagances. I have been your victim for years and years, but my eyes are opened at last. Beginning to-morrow morning, I shall take the full management of this house into my own hands and make a wonderful change."

Mrs. Bowser was wise enough to make no answer, and as he descended to the basement to hunt for something more to chew on she slipped up stairs. He missed her when he came back, and he did not know whether to follow her and raise a row about the last gas bill or to look over his papers with a view of applying for a divorce at eight o'clock in the morning. The question was still undecided in his mind when the thought of a smoke flashed across his mind.

"No, never!" he exclaimed, as he drove it out. "I am a man of will power. I have said I wouldn't smoke, and I won't."

He had found a lemon on his last trip to the pantry, and he sucked away at it and mused:

"All I've got to do is to put my will at work, and I'll show Mrs. Bowser that it is the will of a Napoleon."

The lemon seemed to increase his longing instead of blunting it, and after exchanging it for a stick of cinnamon he mused:

"Still, the question arises if stopping so short off won't give the nervous system a shock? If I should reduce my cigars to five or six a day?—"

A gleam of hope came to his heart and a smile to his face.

"Reduce to six a day at first, and then gradually to none at all. Of course I could stop dead off from to-night and never smoke again. I've got an iron will—"

He suddenly remembered that he had a long, black cigar in the pocket of a coat hanging up in the closet—one given him by the family butcher as he paid his last bill—and he could hear his own heart beating.

Five minutes later Mrs. Bowser looked out of a back window and saw Mr. Bowser seated on a chair in the back yard. He was puffing away at that cigar and had the cat on his knees. There was a smile of acute satisfaction on the face of each, and as she looked he slapped his leg and laughed and chuckled and said to himself:

"You bet your sweet life that Mrs. Bowser is one of the most careful and economical wives in



all this land, and if she wants \$10 pin money in the morning she can have it!"

---

The other night, after the Bowsers had come up from dinner, Mr. Bowser reached down into his coat tail pocket and drew out a little book and sat down and began turning over the leaves. He, of course, wanted Mrs. Bowser to ask questions, and though she had a woman's curiosity, it was ten minutes before she carelessly queried:

"Been buying another book on cattle and their diseases?"

He looked up at her, but did not reply.

"If it is a work on poultry you already have half a dozen in the house."

This time he did not even look up.

"Perhaps you've gone into golf?" she said, after another pause.

"You would probably call it golf, or cattle disease, or poultry," he finally replied.

"If it isn't any of these then what is it?"

"This book, Mrs. Bowser, is probably beyond your comprehension—away beyond it. You wouldn't understand it at all."

"Oh! I wouldn't? You can understand a deep work and I can't?"

"Naturally. A man has the stronger, deeper mind, of course. The title of this work is: 'Nature's Diseases and Remedies—Control of the

Body by the Mind.' Only a philosophical, analytical mind can grasp its contents."

"That's all nonsense," exclaimed Mrs. Bowser.

"What! What's that?" he demanded.

"You are too old to waste time on such bosh, Mr. Bowser."

"Nonsense, is it? Why, it's the plainest principles of philosophy in the world. The human body is but clay—the soul immortal. The soul is the mind. The mind ought to be able to control the body. I told you it was beyond your comprehension. What does a woman know about philosophy?"

"Just as much as a man."

"She can't. She wasn't born that way. For instance, do you believe that the mind can control the body?"

"In some cases, perhaps," she slowly admitted.

"In all cases, Mrs. Bowser—in all cases. For instance, you stub your toe. It hurts like blazes. You let your mind turn to something else and the pain gradually ceases. That is mind over matter. I have experienced it a hundred different times."

"I don't believe it."

"That's it! That's the usual way of the ignorant—ridicule and deny what they can't argue and discuss in a sensible manner. I have often wondered if you really had a soul."

"Don't worry yourself, Mr. Bowser! If I haven't got any soul I've got common sense."

"Very well. It's no use to talk to a person brought up in a log house on the edge of a huckleberry marsh. I know that the mind can control the body. You deny it. I hope to furnish you with proofs within a week."

He was to furnish them that night. Two hours later, when they were about ready to go up stairs and he had been out bareheaded and in his slippers to see if the gate was shut, he suddenly gave a start and cried out:

"Gee-mi-me to Johnson!"

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"That old hollow tooth tried to jump clean out of my head. Whew! Yi! Hang it all!"

He sat down to hold his jaw and weave to and fro, and she said:

"Your tooth jumps. It hurts you. You just let your mind turn to something else and the pain ceases."

He looked up at her with a glint of pounded glass in his eyes, and was about to reply in kind, when the jumper jumped in on him, and he seized his jaw and yelled:

"Great Scots to scatteration, but I can't stand this! Get me some camphor!"

She got him some and after a time the pain eased up and he went to bed. He expected her to

say something about—"Control of the Body by the Mind," but she was waiting. She knew that he wouldn't be let off so easily, and could afford to give him a little time. She was just falling asleep when Mr. Bowser suddenly lifted his feet high in the air and uttered a whoop which set a neighbor's dog to barking, followed by the exclamation:

"Thunder and lightning, but I can't stand this!"

"Mr. Bowser, are you asleep?" she asked.

"Asleep! No! I'm dead. Say, this infernal thing has come back on me! Where's the camphor?"

"On the bureau, dear; but it won't do you any good, you know."

"Oh-h-h-h! Jewhittaker! My stars and soul, but she's jumping my jaw right out of its socket! I've got to have something done for me or I won't live ten minutes!"

"Pshaw, Mr. Bowser—have some grit about you. What is a little toothache?"

"Grit! Grit!" he shouted, as he jumped out of bed and danced around on one leg. "I've got more grit than seven families like yours rolled together, but this is awful—awful! Are you going to lie there and see me drop dead?"

"You can stop it if you will. Just lie down and put your mind to work. Think of something else. Think of being out in the woods at a May festival—beautiful flowers—happy children—green——"

"Green nonsense—shut up!" he yelled. "Haven't we got any paregoric in the house?"

"Yes, but it's down stairs in the medicine box. Why don't you experiment a little, Mr. Bowser? If there is anything in your theory now is a good time to try it. If you can imagine that you are not in pain——"

"Paregoric—peppermint—laudanum—hot ashes—hot salt—cotton-batting!" he howled, as he pranced around and finally disappeared down stairs. He was gone about five minutes, and then came back on the jump with the box under his arm. He filled his mouth with pain killer, tried mustard, flew to peppermint, and after exhausting all the remedies he jumped up and down in the middle of the room and yelled: "Police!"

Mrs. Bowser had to get up and go down stairs, and stir up the fire to make a warm poultice for his jaw, and fuss around for an hour. Finally he grew easier. Then she said to him:

"Mr. Bowser, you brought home a book last night."

"Never!"

"You brought home a book about control of the body by the mind."

"No, I didn't!"

"In your argument you declared that the soul was the mind, and that the mind had control of

the body. You said that if any one stubbed——”

“Get into bed and keep still!”

“No, sir! You stub your toe. It hurts. You let your mind turn to some——”

“I never said it.”

“Mr. Bowser, what has eased your toothache—faith, imagination, or a hot poultice?”

“Who’s talking about toothache, Mrs. Bowser? You get into bed and go to sleep, and in the morning I’ll have a long talk with you. We don’t seem to be suited to each other, and the matter can probably be arranged to our mutual satisfaction and without publicity.”

Next morning he hurried down stairs and got hold of the book first, and she afterwards found some of the leaves scattered in the back yard.

---

Dinner had been dispatched and the Bowsers had settled down for a quiet evening, when Mr. Bowser suddenly remembered something and remarked:

“You know I was over to see Davison the other evening? I had to wait about half an hour for him, and during the interval I talked with Mrs. Davison. I was more than surprised to find how well-informed she was. Davison ought to feel proud of her.”

“I suppose he does,” replied Mrs. Bowser.

“It’s a wonder to me that all women don’t go at

it and inform themselves," continued Mr. Bowser as he laid aside his newspaper.

"Most of the women I know are about as well posted on general affairs as the men."

"What an assertion—ha! ha! ha! Most women know the title of the last love-sick novel, the latest style of hat and who is going to get married next, but as for knowledge of current events they haven't got as much as a cat. However, as the Lord made 'em that way it's all right."

"Why don't you give me a few pointers on current events?" observed Mrs. Bowser, after a minute of silence.

"Hey! Do you mean that?" asked Mr. Bowser as he looked at her over the top of his spectacles.

"Of course. I shall be glad to receive knowledge."

"Well," he said, a little puzzled over her attitude, "the Philippine question is one which concerns everybody. Perhaps you have heard of it?"

"I have. Anything you'd like to ask me about it?"

"A question or two. Where are the islands?"

"North of Borneo, in the China Sea."

"I thought you'd trip up on the very first question, and you have. Mrs. Bowser it gives me pleasure to inform you that the Philippine Islands are situated between the Cape of Good Hope and—and—and let's see? Between the Cape of Good



Hope and Australia. See if you can remember that for five minutes."

"I don't want to remember that," she replied. "The Philippines are where I located them. You are thinking of Madagascar."

"What! you dispute me!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he removed his spectacles and rose up.

"I'll show you a map."

"Map be hanged! What I know, I know! The idea of your disputing me on a point like this!"

"Here's an atlas and here's a map," said Mrs. Bowser, as she took the book from the shelf. "Here's the China Sea—here are the Philippines. Up here you see Japan—down here is Borneo. Who is right?"

"Woman, don't try to bluff me with any old map, because it won't work. I'm going by what I know—not by any Tom-fool business. That's always the way with you when I try to teach you anything."

"Well, never mind," she replied, as she put the book away. "You know the name of the principal island; of course?"

"Certainly I do, and for your personal benefit I will state that it is Manila. You'd better write it down before it escapes your memory."

"You mean Manila is the principal city."

"No, I don't. When I say island I don't mean city."

"But Manila is a city, Mr. Bowser, and the principal island is Luzon."

"What! What!" shouted Mr. Bowser, as he jumped clear of the floor. "You dispute me! You try to correct my geography! Woman, don't you go too far! If you are honest in your ignorance I can bear with you, but don't try to bluff your way through."

"Geography says that the chief island is Luzon, and that Manila is the capital city," quietly replied Mrs. Bowser.

"And what is geography to me?" almost howled Mr. Bowser, as he kicked the cat across the room. "Because geography states that Ohio is in Russia does it make it so? I say that Manila is the principal island, and I'll bet a million dollars to a cent on it."

Mrs. Bowser let him walk around and snuff and snuff and cool off a bit, and then quietly asked:

"How do you spell Philippines?"

"The same as anybody else with sense in his head," sulkily replied Mr. Bowser.

"That is, you put two p's in the word?"

"That is, I don't do any such thing! Any school-boy will tell you that it is spelled with two l's and one p. You'd better get out your spelling book before you go into war or politics."

"The geography and the newspapers give one l and two p's."



"WHAT! WHAT! YOU DISPUTE ME! YOU TRY TO COR-  
RECT MY GEOGRAPHY!"



"What! Disputing me again! Mrs. Bowser, this is too much—too much! If you are trying to make out that I'm a fool why don't you say so and done with it?"

"But look for yourself."

"Never! Never! What do I care how they spell the name? I say that there are two l's in it, and that settles it. When you asked me to post you upon current events I knew you simply wanted to pick a fuss and spoil my evening. Mrs. Bowser—"

"And how do you spell Manila?" she interrupted.

"How do I spell Manila?" he repeated, as he tried to freeze the blood in her veins by an icy glare. "I might ask you how to spell cat or dog, but I don't want to embarrass you. I spell Manila with two l's, but perhaps you and the newspapers and idiot asylums make it end in 'y' instead of 'a'."

"There is only one 'l' in it, Mr. Bowser. Find the name where you will and you will see that I am right."

Mr. Bowser gathered himself to work awful destruction on the furniture of the room, and to raise his voice until it could be heard a mile away, but suddenly checked himself. Then he swallowed at the lump in his throat, grew pale as death, and started for the hatrack in the hall. Mrs. Bowser arose and followed him and queried:

"Are you going out, dear?"

"I am going out," he sternly replied—"o-u-t. Perhaps you spell it some other way."

"But will you be gone long?"

"Don't wait for me. I may be back in an hour, or may not be home for a month. I said home, but it is no home for me. You have broken it up. When a husband becomes a fool in his wife's eyes it is time for him to go."

"But you see you were wrong about the orthography of those——"

"Oh, I was, was I?" he interrupted "Then you still insist that I'm a fool? That will do, Mrs. Bowser—that will do! In pity of your ignorance I set out to post you about certain things. Like other ignorant people, you resent it and seek to cover up your lack of knowledge by bluff. I am through. You can put six p's in Philippine and leave the l's out of Manila if you wish; I go. I bid you good night—n-i-g-h-t, night!"

"But how foolish!"

"N-i-g-h-t, night, Mrs. Bowser, and you needn't sit up for me. When the saloons close, I can walk the streets or go to a hotel. H-o-t-e-l!"

---

"By the way," said Mr. Bowser, as he looked up from his paper, "have you heard from your mother lately?"

"Had a letter yesterday," replied Mrs. Bowser, "and she asked to be remembered to you."

"The dear old soul. I think as much of her as I do of my own mother, I'll give you \$10 to-morrow to buy a nice little present for her. Is your father well?"

"Not very. He's very old, you know."

"Poor old daddy! There never was a nicer man in all this world. I'll give you \$10 to buy something for him as well."

"You are awfully kind," said Mrs. Bowser, as she wiped a tear from her eye.

"Pooh! pooh! Everybody ought to do what is right. I was thinking this afternoon that I cut you pretty close on money matters. I suppose I ought to make you a regular weekly allowance, and then you can depend on having just so much."

"It is awfully sweet and kind of you."

"No taffy, my dear!" laughed Mr. Bowser, "I was going to say \$5 per week, but I guess I'll make it \$10. If that won't do you, let me know later on and I'll make it \$15 or \$20."

Mrs. Bowser looked at him through her tears and called him the best-hearted and most loving husband in the world. If a neighbor had come in just then to create an interruption, all would have been well, but fate willed it otherwise. In his great good nature, which in the average husband is the prelude of a row, Mr. Bowser whistled a merry air and stroked the family cat and planned with himself to buy Mrs. Bowser a hundred dollar



clock next day as a surprise. He was growing real frolicsome when she ventured to say:

"Had you just as soon look over three or four little bills which have come in during the week?"

"Bills!" echoed Mr. Bowser, as his whistle cut short off and he cuffed the cat off his knee, "I always pay cash down, and I don't know anything about bills. Where are they?"

"You—you didn't happen to have the change and told me to go ahead," she said, as she produced three or four papers. "A water pipe burst one day, you know, and you told me to send for the plumber. Here is his bill, and I'm sure it's a very reasonable one."

"Two dollars, eh? Two dollars for plugging up a pin hole leak in a water pipe! Does that tinker imagine I'm a fool or a lunatic? I'll never pay it this side of the grave! What else?"

"You told me to get the door bell fixed and the bill is \$1."

"Door bell! I told you! Never! If the door bell was out of order then it was because you stood there and hauled and pulled and yanked on it and finally got it out by the roots. You'll pay that bill out of your own pocket!"

"And I had a broken window pane in the cook's bedroom replaced," said Mrs. Bowser. "I knew you'd tell me to go ahead and the bill is only eighty cents."

"Eighty cents!" he shouted, as he grew red to the roots of his hair. "Eighty cents for a small pane of glass, when glass can be bought by the rod for fifty cents! And who busted that pane of glass, Mrs. Bowser? The cook probably got mad because I found fault with the coffee and stood before the window and deliberately kicked out a pane of glass to get even. I'll keep it out of her wages! What else?"

"You know I told you that the lock on the basement door was out of order?"

"Never! Never heard the slightest allusion to it!"

"And you said I should send for a locksmith?"

"Never! Never!"

"And the bill is forty cents."

"Forty cents! Forty cents for two minutes' work! And if that lock was out of order how came it so? Did that cook, in order to get even with me again, stand there with a crowbar and whack and jab and pound until she broke the lock? That's forty cents more out of her wages! Are these all?"

"Yes. If you don't feel like paying them I'll do ~~it~~ out of my weekly allowance. The whole thing only amounts to \$4.20."

"Your weekly allowance!" he repeated, "Mrs. Bowser, have you a weekly allowance from a royalty or an estate?"

"You said you'd give me one, you know."

"Never! If I said anything at all touching the subject it was to the effect that if you had an allowance you'd pay a dollar a pound for sausages!"

"Then you can send mother five dollars and pay these bills with the rest," she suggested.

"Mother? Five dollars? You may or may not have a mother, Mrs. Bowser—I do not know nor care—but why should I send her five dollars?"

"You—you said you would."

"Never! It has never occurred to me in the last fifteen years to ask if you had parents or were an orphan!"

Mrs. Bowser crossed the room and sat down and picked up a book and Mr. Bowser got up and crossed his hands under his coat tails and walked about. He finally stopped before her and, balancing himself on heels and toes, he said:

"Mrs. Bowser, I had planned to spend a pleasant evening with you. I came home with a heart full of love and kindness, and I was ready to do anything to show how much I appreciated my home."

"But what have I done?" she asked.

"It is useless to thrash over old straw. Even as I was thinking of buying you a costly present as a surprise you—you—"

"I handed you these bills. I said I would pay them out of my own pocket."

"Yes, you handed me those bills. I do not complain of that. I do not complain of the amount,

which is insignificant. What I want you to understand is that there is a great underlying principle in this matter."

"I don't see it!" she curtly replied.

"Of course not—no wife ever does. That is why the press of the country is filled with so many murders, elopements and divorce cases. I sit down beside you of an evening with a heart full of love and affection, I am hardly seated when—"

"When I hand you three or four little bills for repairs to the house, which you authorized me to incur!" she interrupted.

"Mrs. Bowser," he said, as his thumbs went up to the armholes of his vest, "it is needless to say more on this subject. If you cannot discern the great underlying principle, talk is idle. I will retire to my library, and should any one call, you can say that I am busy—very, very busy—and that it is quite likely you may shortly go home to see your mother! Good night, Mrs Bowser—good night!"

And Mrs. Bowser sat there for an hour and tried to figure it out, and the nearest she could come to it was:—Never present a bill to your husband when he's good natured. Wait until he's "off" and the bills can't make him much "offer."

---

Mr. Bowser had been quietly reading his evening paper for half an hour, with the family cat rubbing

against his legs at intervals, when he suddenly flung the paper down and exclaimed:

"By George, but I wish I had been in that man's place with a revolver in my pocket!"

"What has happened?" asked Mrs Bowser

"Why, a man who couldn't get a seat on the street car refused to pay his fare and was chucked off by the conductor and had an arm broken"

"Well, he ought to have paid his fare."

"Not much, he hadn't! What he ought to have done was to blow that conductor full of holes. Lordy, but when I read of such things it makes me want to commit murder!"

"I shouldn't get excited over what happens to other folks," observed Mrs. Bowser, as he picked up the paper and read the article over again.

"But I can't help it!" he shouted, as he got up and paced up and down and gestured as if hitting a punching bag. "I tell you the time has come when a free-born American citizen seems to have lost all his personal rights. Look at the police. A respectable citizen is standing on the corner waiting for his car, and a blue-coated minion comes up and orders him to move on. He protests, of course, and he gets a whack on the head which sends him to the hospital. That is an everyday occurrence."

"But no policeman has ever whacked you."

"No, and it is well they haven't. If I am ever

struck with a club I'll make this whole State shake from center to circumference before I drop the matter. Here's an account of a citizen who starts for the nearest drug store for medicine. Four scoundrels hold him up and rob and thump him, but no arrests are made. It is no longer safe to walk the streets at night. By George, but I can't hold myself when I think of it!"

"But why should you excite yourself?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as he began kicking the chairs out of his road.

"Because I'm a citizen and a taxpayer!" he shouted, as he turned on her with arm upraised and his face red hot. "Because I have certain rights under the Constitution of the United States which no man must interfere with except at his peril. Because I see a tendency on the part of officials and corporations to crush out liberty in America."

"Has anyone attempted to crush you?"

"Perhaps not. Perhaps it is plain to be seen that I am not a man to be crushed, but if this thing continues who can tell what may happen? In the last three months twenty-two persons have been run over by beer wagons and hacks and butcher carts, and not a driver has been sent to state prison. At a fire two days ago a citizen was knocked senseless by a fireman because he wouldn't move back. At the post office I wait for ten minutes to buy

some stamps, and when I ask the clerk if he is running his own business or employed by the Government he answers that I'd better take a dyspepsia cure. What do you suppose will be the end of such a state of affairs? How long will it be before some tramp calls me to the door and hits me between the eyes and takes my watch and money?"

"But as long as it can't be changed why worry over it?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"But it can be changed."

"How?"

"The same as the obnoxious laws of Rome were changed after the people had suffered for years and years. The people of this country are ripe for a change. All they want is a leader—some one to take the initiative."

"But where is the leader?"

"Right here, Mrs. Bowser!" he added as he patted himself on the breast. "Yes, sir; I'll take the lead in a movement that will become world-wide in a month from this. I've been thinking of it for the last three months, and now my mind is fully made up. I don't mean to pose as a reformer, but I'll do battle for the rights of the people."

"I shouldn't raise any fuss in public and make myself ridiculous. I think most people are able to look out for their own rights."

"I beg to differ with you. The people of this country have been clubbed, run over and walked



into the earth until they have no grit left. You'll see how quickly they'll rally, however, when they have a leader. I may be back in an hour or not for a day or two."

"But you are not going out to-night!" protested Mrs. Bowser as he put on his hat.

"I am going right out and make a test case," he replied. "We can't begin this crusade too soon. We will see if the conductor of an overcrowded car will chuck me off and break my arm because I refuse to pay fare without a seat."

She begged and entreated, and the cat came out into the hall and yeowled in a sorrowful way, but Mr. Bowser was firm. He had scarcely walked half a block after leaving the house when he came across a couple of hard looking men leaning up against a fence. They were doubtless waiting to hold up some citizen—some citizen who didn't look as if he could take care of himself. Beyond them on the corner was a policeman flirting with a nurse-girl, who had been sent out for paregoric, and he walked up to the officer and said:

"Is this what the taxpayers of this town pay you for? Do you spend your time chinning with nurse-girls when footpads are doing business under your nose?"

"What do you mean by such talk?" demanded the officer, as the girl took to her heels.

"I mean that if you don't attend to the business

you are paid to look after you won't be on the force three days longer."

"You must be drunk or crazy, and I've a good mind to run you in!"

"I defy you to do it!"

The jaw lasted ten minutes and Mr. Bowser was so defiant and aggressive that the officer sized him up for a politician with a pull and gave him the victory. The two men against the fence were laborers waiting for a comrade, but the officer ran them off and began to look out for other suspicious characters. Mr. Bowser was in good fettle as he waited for an overcrowded car. It was fifteen minutes before one came along, and as he boarded it he was obliged to stand on the running board. The conductor came for his fare, but it was refused.

"I'll not pay without a seat," was the firm reply.

"Then you must get off!"

"Never! I'm not to blame that you don't run cars enough."

"Say, old man, are you out for a row?" asked the conductor.

"I'm out for my rights. No seat, no fare."

There were a dozen other people without seats, and Mr. Bowser looked for them to support him, but instead of so doing they all cried out that he should be put off. The car was stopped and the motorman came back to help the conductor, and



"IS THAT WHAT THE TAXPAYERS OF THIS TOWN PAY  
YOU FOR?"



Mr. Bowser was asked if he would get off peaceably.

"Not if I die for it!" he replied. "This is a test case to see whether the public has any rights, and I ask the public to stand by me!"

"Put the old kicker off!" yelled the oppressed public, and the conductor and motorman sailed in.

It is due to Mr. Bowser to say that he made a good fight for it, but in the course of two minutes he was a "chucked" man. That is, he was flung in the dust on his back, his coat torn off and his hat busted, and as he got up a policeman gave him a push and warned him to go home if he didn't want to pass the night in the jug. Half an hour later he arrived home. Mrs. Bowser and the cat were waiting for him in the sitting room. They looked him over as he stood before them in a state of dilapidation, and they looked him over as he shed his torn coat and battered hat and flung himself down upon the lounge. Then the cat turned her back on him to grin at the wall and Mrs. Bowser quietly asked:

"Well, is the movement to become world-wide?"

But Mr. Bowser answered never a word. He lay on his back and closed his eyes and was as one dead to the world and the rights of the taxpayers.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HE TAKES UP WITH A TRAMP.

Mr. Bowser had come home not exactly mad, but he was in that state of mind known as "techy." He found Mrs. Bowser so pleasant, the dinner so good and the house looking so well that he couldn't find fault with anything until he sat down to his evening paper. He hadn't been reading over five minutes when he burst out with:

"By George, but I have always said it would come to this, and here it is!"

"Has another king been assassinated?" asked Mrs. Bowser, without much interest.

"No there hasn't, but there has been an attempt to assassinate the Constitution of the United States—to murder equality, to stab our democratic republic in the back. A Chicago millionaire who took a street car for a short ride, found himself alongside one of his employees. What do you suppose he did?"

"Bowed to him and offered to pay his fare probably."

"He did, eh? That's all you know about it. It so happens that he called the conductor and had the employee bounced off. He said he didn't propose to ride along with the riffraff. By hen, but I'd like to have been there! Because the man had accumulated a few thousand dollars he looked upon common humanity as so much dirt. He wouldn't even ride in a street car with a man who had to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow."

"It was silly for him to make such an exhibition of himself," said Mrs. Bowser, "but there is no call for you to get a stroke of apoplexy over it."

"But don't you see the attempt to create an aristocracy in this country—don't you see it?" he shouted, as he waved the paper on high and brought the cat out from under the lounge to see what the row was about.

"Well, what of it? Why should you care?"

"I care because all men are born free and equal; because one man is as good as another; because money don't make the man. That's what ails the poor man to-day. We are trying to class him with the animals of the field. It's this shoddy aristocracy drawing its skirts away from the laboring man that makes socialists and anarchists. Because we happen to have a few thousand dollars in the bank are we better than our washerwoman or the man who takes out the ashes?"



"I haven't heard of your inviting them to dinner or sitting down to tell stories."

"Then, by thunder, but you will, and this very night, too!" he roared as he kicked over a chair and went stamping around. "The people of this country want to know who are the snobs. I'll soon prove to which class I belong!"

He started for the front hall and had his hat on before Mrs. Bowser could ask him what he was going to do. Without replying to the question he passed out of doors, and from the parlor window she saw him halting at the gate. He didn't have to wait there long. A tramp who had been loafing on the corner below and striking a score of persons in vain for bed money soon came shuffling along. He was debating whether to strike or not to strike when Mr. Bowser observed:

"My friend, you are a man."

"I expect I am," was the reply.

"And as a man you are just as good as I am. Because I happen to be better off in this world's goods than you are I have no right to look down on you."

"Say, old man," remarked the tramp, as a grin spread over his face, "unless you are drunk you are talkin' straight from the shoulder. I like to hear it."

"I am neither drunk nor a snob," continued Mr. Bowser. "I say you are a man, born free and

equal. As a man you are entitled to my respect, whether you are a millionaire or a laboring man."

"And you don't set yourself up 'as bein' above me?"

"No, sir."

"And I'm as good as you are?"

"Just as good."

"Shake, old man. You don't know how you encourage me. If I'm as good as you are, then mebbe—mebbe——"

"Come right in and have dinner, and after that we'll talk. There'll be no aristocracy built up in America if a man of my size can prevent it."

"You ain't goin' to git me in there to give me the boot?" asked the tramp, as he hung back and wondered over his good luck.

"I am going to use you as an equal. Come along."

The man was taken into the basement and the cook ordered to give him his dinner at the table. She looked in wonder and astonishment and demurred, but Mr. Bowser insisted, and she reluctantly complied. When the fellow had got well at work, Mr. Bowser went upstairs to explain what he had done and what was to follow, but Mrs. Bowser had gone to her room. He was minded to call her down and ask her to play the piano, but on second thought he decided not to rush the business too much at first. After twenty minutes

he went down, but the tramp was still heaving it in with knife and fork. He had asked for something to "wet up," and the cook had put on a bottle of claret, with which he was making free. Mr. Bowser winced a little, but gave him fifteen minutes more. At the end of that time there was still a piece of the second loaf of bread left, and it was about ten minutes more before the tramp had finished. A barrel of food and a bottle of wine had restored the gall of the "equal" to its pristine glory, and, shoving back from the table at last with a sigh of contentment, he pounded on the board with his knife and called to the girl:

"Hey, slavey, bring hither one of the old man's perfectos and let the wrapper be speckled!"

"How dare you talk that way to me?" demanded the indignant cook.

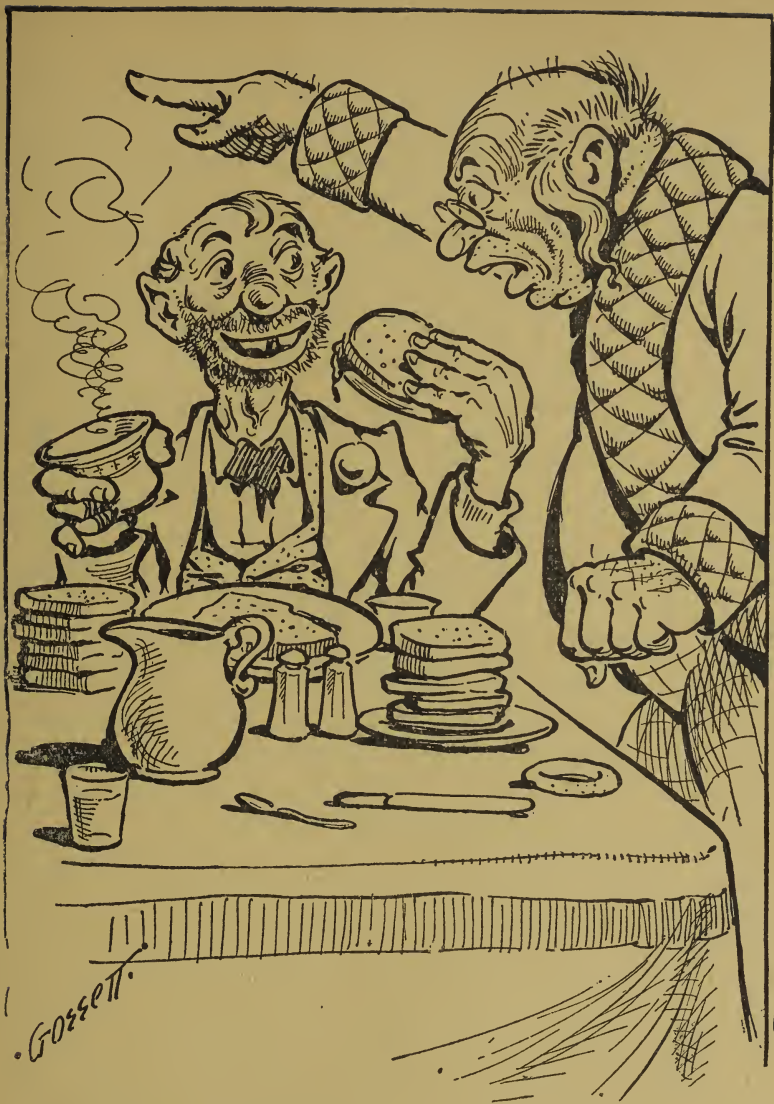
"A perfecto, post wrestler, or out you go!"

Mr. Bowser heard from the head of the stairs, and his hair began to rise. Running down, he said:

"Look here, but ain't you rather overdoing this thing?"

"Not at all, old bird," was the smiling reply. "We are both men and equals. You have the dough, and I'm dead broke. It's your business to divide. How are you heeled for cash?"

"I'll show you how I'm heeled, sir! There is the door! I want no more of your society!"



"NOT AT ALL, OLD BIRD, WE ARE BOTH MEN AND  
EQUALS!"



"But you can't turn me down that way, old man—oh, no! My name is Jim the Sticker. When I gits a good thing, I hangs on. Don't go back on what you said about all men bein' equal."

Mr Bowser again ordered him out, but as he refused to go he was taken hold of to be assisted. He didn't propose to drop the equality business without a struggle, and there was a row in which the dining room was almost wrecked and Mr. Bowser was badly pummeled. By the time the cook had brought a policeman and Mrs. Bowser and the cat had got down stairs the tramp had filled his pockets with knives, forks and spoons and got away. Nothing could be said to the man left lying on the floor on his back. He had leveled all distinctions and been leveled himself.

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For half an hour after dinner the other evening Mr. Bowser was uneasy and waiting for Mrs. Bowser to ask him what was the cause. As she didn't do so, he finally said:

"I suppose you have heard and read more or less about palmistry?"

"Yes," she answered.

"And do you believe in it?"

"I thought you'd bring home a new fad soon. So you have turned to palmistry?"

"There you go, woman. If I was to bring home a gospel hymnbook found in the road, you'd call

it a fad. It's mighty singular that I can't make a move without your twitting and taunting me of being a half idiot."

"Well, what is it about palmistry?" she asked.

"I had my palm read about a week ago, and the palmist told things so straight that I got him to give me a few lessons. As far as I know, you never had your palm read."

"And I don't think I will. It's too much like fortune telling."

"But just let me take your hand and look at what they call the life line. I want to see whether you are to live to a good old age or not."

Mrs. Bowser complied, and after a moment's study he scratched his head and muttered:

"Well, that's a mighty singular thing, and I can't account for it. You are going to live to be at least ninety years old."

"Yes, I hope so."

"And according to my life line so am I."

"All the better."

"But according to that crisscross line there you are to be a widow before you are forty."

"Well?"

"And according to my crisscross line I'm to be a widower before I'm fifty."

"Then it seems that there's something out of gear with the crisscross. You'd better look at the lines on the soles of your feet and see if they won't



help you out. If they don't, you might go to an astrologer during the full of the moon and carrying a black cat in your pocket and a horseshoe over your heart."

"Woman, remember whom you are talking to!" shouted Mr Bowser, as he flushed up and flung her hand away.

"But you get such silly notions into your head. Let us drop palmistry this evening and have a game of cards or run into Green's. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Here—look at my hand again if you wish."

"But I do not wish," he stiffly replied. "There are some folks so blamed mean that their palms tell nothing more than a gridiron would. I took up palmistry for a diversion, and I propose to carry it along in spite of your would-be sarcasm. If you want to go into Green's, take the cat along with you. I'll go down and read the cook's future for her."

Mrs. Bowser leaned back with a sigh, and the cat followed Mr. Bowser downstairs with a well-founded belief that something of interest would occur. The cook looked up with surprise as her dominions were invaded, and that surprise increased as she learned the object of the visit. She felt it her duty, however, to hold out her hand as requested, and after a look at it Mr. Bowser sagely said:

"This line here indicates a short life and a violent death. This other line tells me that you will never marry. This other line indicates that you—"

"That's enough, sir," she said, as she pulled her hand away. "Do you see that line there? Well, that indicates that if you are to come fooling around this kitchen with your nonsense, I'll pack me trunk and be off in the morning. Why don't you go out and read the hen tracks in the alley and find that you are to grow whiskers clear down to your toes?"

"But, my dear woman, this is palmistry," he mildly protested. "Nature has engraven certain lines on your palm as an index—"

"I am no index, sir, and if you are not satisfied with my cooking I'll go. All the lines on me palms come from rubbing the washboard and handling the flatiron, and that's all there is to it. Am I to go?"

Mr. Bowser went instead. He was piqued and chagrined at his failure, and the sight of a half-suppressed smile on Mrs. Bowser's face set his ears to working.

"I might have known she had a head of putty!" he exclaimed, as he squared off for a row.

Mrs. Bowser discreetly held her tongue, and the cat took a walk under the piano and toned down her purr. For five minutes Mr. Bowser paraded up and down and then marched down the hall,

clapped his hat on his head and passed out on the steps. He was just in time to meet a person ascending, and the person saluted him with:

"Could you help a man with a dying wife and six starving children?"

"Have you ever heard about palmistry?" queried Mr. Bowser in reply after a minute.

"I have, sir. It's the lines in your hands."

"Yes. Do you believe in it?"

"I do."

"Ah, you do! Then I am glad to meet you. Have you had your hand read?"

"I have, sir, and not half an hour ago. That's why I came here. I was told that you'd give me a quarter."

"But that isn't palmistry."

"The straightest kind, sir. It's right there in one of the lines that you'd give me a quarter and perhaps an old suit of clothes."

"Then they lied to you. I'm not giving quarters to tramps. I've seen you hanging around this street for a year or more."

"Then I'll get nothing from you?"

"No, sir."

"Then I'll tell you of another line in my hand. The feller who read it said I'd bump up against the meanest old skinflint in town before my good luck came, and I've bumped."

"What! What! You clear out of this!" shouted

Mr. Bowser, as he grabbed the man by the collar and shook him.

"Yes, sir, and the next line indicates that I'm a peaceful man till I'm aroused, but that when anybody takes me by the collar and tries to shake the teeth out of my mouth—"

"You won't go, eh?" shouted Mr. Bowser, as they mixed it up.

"Let go my hair."

"Don't try to grab my throat!"

"And don't shake me!"

"What you want is a good thumping!"

"But no baldhead can give it to me! Hit me in the stomach, will you? Then take that!"

Five minutes later Mrs. Bowser and the cat went to the door to look out. Mr. Bowser sat there bareheaded, with a handkerchief to his left eye, and at the bottom of the steps an old goat that had wandered into the yard was eating up his hat.

"I—I thought I heard grunts and groans and a struggle out here," she said.

No reply.

"Have you got discouraged about palmistry?"

He gurgled in his throat, but no words came.

"It was funny we didn't see a crisscross line indicating a tramp," continued Mrs. Bowser. "Do you think we missed it?"

Mr. Bowser softly dabbed the hankerchief against his aching optic and heaved a sigh, and

the crickets sang, the big white moon looked down in gentleness, and Mrs. Bowser slid into the house, and hunted up the arnica and a bundle of soft rags.

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While the Bowsers were at dinner the other evening a boy left a package at the door, which so excited Mrs. Bowser's curiosity and suspicion that she queried:

"Been buying a fall overcoat or something?"

"I made a purchase to-day, but it is not a fall overcoat," replied Mr. Bowser.

"It isn't another kodak?"

"I know nothing about kodaks, ma'am. As the evenings are growing longer, and as neither of us care to go out very often, it struck me that we would make our fireside as pleasant as possible. I think this is the feeling of all husbands—they would rather remain at home than pass the evening at the club or in a saloon. Alas! however, it is the wife who drives them out!"

"I never heard that she did," observed Mrs. Bowser, as she felt more than ever convinced that he had been indulging in some new fad.

"Perhaps not. There are several things in this world you haven't heard of yet."

Mr. Bowser accompanied his words with a look intended to put a stop to all further questions, and nothing more was said until they had finished and gone upstairs. Then he lugged the bundle

from the hall into the sitting room with an air of mystery and importance. As he cut the strings, he said:

"You may or you may not have heard of the graphophone. Between reading dime novels and pitching into the cook you may not have had time to hear of this wonderful invention."

"I have heard of it and seen it," replied Mrs. Bowser, with considerable pepper in her voice.

"Ah! then you know all about it? Well, I have rented a graphophone. A great many people have talked and sung into it, and we will hear what they have said and sung. We will also do some singing and talking ourselves. Later on I may buy the machine. When I have passed from the earth away—when you have collected and squandered my life insurance and married again—there may come a lonely hour some evening when you may wish to hear my voice again. If so, you will sit down and press the button. Let us now listen to a song from Ada Rehan."

Mr. Bowser started the wheels revolving and after the usual preliminary flourishes from the bowels of the machine, a song was trilled forth. It was a song about Maggie Murphy and her home, and the singer of it had a voice like a bulldog growling from the depths of an empty barrel.

"That can't be Ada Rehan," said Mrs. Bowser, as she began to laugh.

Mr. Bowser knew that a mistake had been made, but he drew himself up and stiffly said:

"This machine never makes a mistake, madam. That is Ada Rehan in her favorite song. She has melted thousands to tears by that plaintive melody. I could listen to it all night. We will, however, have some grand opera by Speiza."

"Who is Speiza?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"Never you mind who Speiza is, but listen to his grandest effort. When he had sung this before the Emperor of Germany he was given the cross of honor. Hark!"

Mrs. Bowser was all attention. There was a whizzing and a wheezing, and then came the air of "Coming Thro' the Rye." It had been sung into the machine by three men, one of whom had drunk a keg of beer too much and was four notes behind his companions.

"Then that's grand opera!" laughed Mrs. Bowser.

"That is grand opera, madam," replied Mr. Bowser, as his hair began to curl and he stopped the music. He realized that he had got a mix-up somewhere, but he didn't propose to admit the fact. Instead of trying to straighten things out, he continued:

"We will now listen to the voices of some celebrated men and women who have talked into this



machine. You have perhaps heard of the Empress of Austria?"

"Yes, I know there is an Empress of Austria."

"Well, she will now talk to us. Here she goes."

And she went. She started off with, "Hello, old man—how's your chin?" and ended up with, "Set 'em up for the crowd, you slab-sided son of a gun!" Mrs. Bowser laughed until she had to sit down, but Mr. Bowser stood there with his hair climbing up and his face growing white and never a smile.

"The Empress of Austria has a rather free and easy style of conversation," observed Mrs. Bowser, after she got control of herself.

"She is a lady, madam, and above criticism!" haughtily replied Mr. Bowser. "My object in bringing home this machine was to make a pleasant evening for us both. Are you determined to defeat that object?"

"On the contrary, I am enjoying myself splendidly," she replied, as she choked back a titter.

"Then don't play the idiot. I will now talk into the machine and then reproduce my own voice and words. I will repeat those beautiful verses entitled, 'Bingen on the Rhine.'"

And Mr. Bowser bent forward, swelled out his chest and repeated. He was more than pleased with his oratorical efforts, but in his manipulation of the cylinders he got things wrong again, and the



"SET 'EM UP FOR THE CROWD, YOU SLAB-SIDED SON OF A GUN!"



voice which was reproduced was that of some variety actress, and "Bingen" was transformed into a song entitled, "The Mashers on Our Block." He cut it off as soon as possible, but Mrs. Bowser had gone off into a fit of laughter, which she could not control for two or three minutes. During this interval he kicked the family cat across the room, upset the piano stool with his knee and rushed the graphophone into a closet. If it had belonged to him he would have jumped on it with both feet and flung the mangled remains out of a back window. He had clapped on his hat when Mrs. Bowser recovered enough to inquire:

"Isn't there anything further, Mr. Bowser?"

"Nothing further, madam!"

"Can't you reproduce one of President McKinley's speeches?"

"Not for this audience! The show is over, madam!"

"But I thought we were to pass a pleasant evening together?"

"So we were, madam—so we were! I rent a graphophone and send it home that we may enjoy the songs and words of others. You immediately begin to play the mule in order to drive me from my fireside into some three-cent lager beer saloon."

"But it was so funny!" she laughed. "You stood up there and repeated 'Bingen on the Rhine' so

nicely and with such dignity, and to hear it come out——”

“Madam, you have gained your object!” interrupted Mr. Bowser, as he started for the front door.

“But I had no object.”

“You have broken up our evening—destroyed my pleasure—driven me to a saloon to associate with old bums and drunks and to get drunk myself. Madam, good night! If you hear some one kick in the front door and yell at midnight, just remember that you drove him to it—drove him to it! Again, good night!”

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That Mr. Bowser was about to make a break of some sort was apparent to Mrs. Bowser before he had been home five minutes, but she asked no questions, and he managed to hang on to himself until after dinner. Then he rubbed his hands together and chuckled softly and said:

“I suppose that if I should tell you that I expect to make a clean thousand dollars a month on the outside for the next five years you’d call it one of my fads, wouldn’t you?”

“Perhaps not,” answered Mrs. Bowser, doubtfully. “Are you going to speculate?”

“Not at all. I have simply struck a sure thing.”

“If it’s a sure thing it will be nice. What is it?”

“I’ll tell you, though you won’t understand. Not

one woman in ten thousand has a business head on her. I have often wished you knew something of business, so that I could talk to you. It isn't your fault that the Lord created you to read novels and gad around to the stores in search of bargains, and so I don't lay it up against you. I'll tell you what my new move is. I am going into hogs."

"I can understand that much," quietly replied Mrs. Bowser. "You are going to raise hogs in order to supply the market with pork."

"That's the plan to a dot, and you deserve praise for catching on so quickly. I propose to buy a thousand pigs. A pig six months old can be bought for a dollar."

"And one thousand pigs for one thousand dollars."

"That's it. I invest \$1,000 in pigs. At the age of two years every pig is ready to be made into pork. The average weight of a two-year-old pig ready for the pork barrel is two hundred pounds. Fresh pork is worth thirteen cents per pound. That is \$26 for every pig, or \$25 clear profit. Any man with an ounce of brains in his head can figure \$25,000 clear profit in two years. Is there any fad about that?"

"I'm sorry I haven't got a business head on me," said Mrs. Bowser as she got pencil and paper, "but I will figure with you a little. Where are you going to fatten your hogs?"

"Why, on a farm, of course. You don't suppose I'm going to turn the basement of our house into a pig pen, do you?"

"But where is your farm?"

Mr. Bowser's jaw dropped. He hadn't figured on a farm.

"A farmer figures that it costs six cents per pound to make pork for market," continued Mrs. Bowser. "Those are his figures even when he owns his farm and grows his own corn. It will take, in addition to all other feed, at least twenty bushels of corn for every one of your pigs. Have you figured on buying 20,000 bushels of corn, Mr. Bowser?"

He began to flush up and breathe hard, but he made no reply.

"To care for a thousand hogs you must hire at least five men. It will cost you quite a sum to get them together. There will be more or less loss to figure on. You must also figure on butchering and getting your pork to market. And you haven't counted in——"

"Woman, do you take me for a fool!" shouted Mr. Bowser as he jumped off his chair and frightened the family cat under the piano.

"Not at all," she calmly replied. "A fool would go into this hog scheme and lose \$5,000 instead of making \$25,000, but you won't."

He didn't know whether to bluff it out or give



in gracefully, but finally decided to do the latter. Her facts and figures were beyond dispute and had laid him cold, but for fear she would feel puffed up over it, he said:

"Of course I should have figured it all out to a penny before investing any money. What you say is all guess-work, but we'll let it go for a time. In fact, the hog scheme was a secondary matter. I've got a better thing than that. I was in hopes Brown might drop in this evening and talk it over with me."

"Why not talk it over with me?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"You won't comprehend it, of course, but I'll give you an outline of it. How much do you suppose a man down in Ohio has made out of chickens in the last year?"

"A thousand dollars, perhaps."

"Over \$5,000 clean money, and next year he will double that amount. I've got my facts and figures down pat, and I'm going into chicken raising."

"What are your facts and figures?"

"You can't understand them, but I'll give you a few. I start in with 1,000 hens."

"Where do you start?"

"Where do I start? Perhaps you imagine I'm going to make a hen roost of the top of the house! I start in our back yard, of course. I buy 1,000 hens at twenty-five cents apiece."

"I don't know where you are going to do it," said Mrs. Bowser. "The very lowest figure you can make is fifty cents, and the fowls will be common at that. Having got your thousand hens together, then what?"

"Then I depend on eggs and chickens," replied Mr. Bowser. "I figure on 500 eggs per day. We'll call it fifty dozen, and put the price at twenty cents per dozen. There's \$10 per day for sure. One thousand hens ought to hatch ten thousand chickens per year. Each chicken will readily sell for—"

"Just wait a minute. Let us begin with the back yard. We have an area of 30x45 feet. One thousand hens wouldn't have room to flap their wings in that space."

"Are you trying to make out that I don't know enough to come in when it rains?" shouted Mr. Bowser as he bobbed up with furious gestures.

"Not at all; you are going into poultry. You are going to make a fortune. I haven't a business head on me, of course, but I can figure a little. You might coop up fifty hens in the back yard, but not more. As to eggs, if you get two hundred a day from a thousand hens you would do well. The increase would not be half what you figure. Then you have not figured on the expense of lumber and carpenter work for the coops, nor for feed and help. You see——"

"Yes, I see—of course I see! I see that you

know nothing about poultry. I tell you that any man with an ounce of brains can make \$5,000 a year out of two thousand fowls."

"Well, let us see how it is done."

"It's done in a business way, of course."

"Then we'll figure in a business way. You will want lumber and nails for the coops, and there will be carpenter work. How much lumber——"

"Not a plank—not a board—not a foot!" howled Mr. Bowser.

"But how are you going to do?"

"None of your business! I go to work and invent a plan to make \$5,000 a year as easy as rolling off a log. I come home feeling pleasant over it. Like an ass I state the plan to you, and you immediately and maliciously set out to tear it to pieces. Woman——"

It was lucky for Mr. Bowser that just then he heard the voice of a tramp in the basement hall asking the cook for a bite to eat. It offered him a diversion, and he took advantage of it. He turned from Mrs. Bowser and rushed down stairs, followed by the cat, and he fell upon that unsuspecting tramp like a thunderbolt. There was a mix-up, three or four whoops and yells, and then the tramp broke loose and spread his wings and made for the street. He didn't stop to open the gate, but went over the fence like a bird, and the chase was over. When Mr. Bowser returned to the sitting room pencil

and paper had disappeared, and the diplomatic Mrs. Bowser was looking into the family almanac to see what day in the week the next fourth of July would fall on.

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"We have a gallon kettle in the house, of course?" queried Mr. Bowser after he had reached the end of his cigar the other evening.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Bowser, "but why should you want a gallon kettle?"

"Do you know how many people die of consumption in America every year?" he asked in turn.

"No."

"Well, the number is close upon a million, and in all but a few cases death ensues, because the proper remedies are not obtainable when the dread disease is in its incipient stage. Out of every fifty deaths by consumption forty-nine are poor people, who are not saved because they have no money to buy a remedy."

"Well?"

"Well, I—I have a remedy."

"You've got a cure for consumption which you are going to give away to the poor?"

"That's it, Mrs. Bowser—that's the idea. I can't save 'em all, you know, but if I can rescue 5,000 of my fellow creatures from death every year I shall feel amply repaid for the few dollars it will cost.

I am going to make a cure for consumption and distribute it free gratis through drug stores and physicians."

"That's all nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowser with considerable tartness in her tones. "You've simply got some new fad to work out, and this turning philanthropist is bosh. You'd better let consumption alone and cure that corn on your toe."

"—You—you are talking to me, are you?" he asked as he put on his spectacles to get a clearer look at her.

"Of course I am."

"And being fully aware that I am your husband?"

"But you make me impatient with your fads. Some quack doctor has been working you for a soft snap."

"Soft snap? Quack doctor? Woman, I don't want to hear any more such expressions. I don't want my home turned into a minstrel show. If you wish to oppose my idea, founded upon the noblest and grandest sentiments of the human heart, do so, but do it with dignity. You object to my saving 5,000 human lives per year, do you?"

"I do."

"You want me to go my way without care while a million of my fellow-beings are marching to their graves?"

"Yes, sir."

"And not extend a hand to draw one of them back?"

"Not a hand. You'd better attend right to your own business and let the doctors look out for consumptives."

Mr. Bowser stood and glared at her for a full minute. His face flushed, his ears twitched, and his Adam's apple worked up and down like a toy monkey on a stick. He had just drawn a long breath to utter a yell when he checked himself and turned away. He had left a number of packages on the hall-tree, and, securing these, he proceeded to the kitchen and asked the cook for the kettle.

"Is it going to be an experiment with gunpowder?" she asked, as she handed it to him.

"My dear woman," replied Mr. Bowser, as he looked at her sharply, "I think you betray signs of consumption."

"It can't be!"

"But I'm sure of it. Do not be alarmed, however. I am about to compound a certain and speedy cure. One bottle will restore you to health, and it won't cost you a cent. I propose to save 5,000 lives this year."

"If I've got consumption I'm going right away to my sister's to-night!" exclaimed the cook as she untied her apron.

"But you can be saved."

"But I can't wait!"

Away she went to notify Mrs. Bowser and pack her trunk, and Mr. Bowser hadn't got all his stuff mixed in the kettle when he heard the front door shut behind her. He expected a call and a protest from Mrs. Bowser, but she did not appear. He had brought home molasses, gin, gum arabic, licorice and two or three other things, which were to be mixed with the yolks of six eggs and heated over the fire, and he needed no help. He had mixed according to a recipe which had cost him \$5, but when the compound began to heat up the smell was not agreeable, and the taste did not suit his palate.

"While it is the duty of a consumptive to swallow a cure without kicking," he mused as he looked about the pantry, "I might as well mix in something to tickle the palate. I'll just shake in a little ginger. I've heard that consumptives craved ginger."

The ginger didn't seem to make much change and he grated in a nutmeg and then poured in half a bottle of vanilla. He was slowly stirring the contents of the kettle and wondering if a lemon or two wouldn't make it just right when the compound suddenly foamed up and boiled over. As it ran over the edges of the kettle there was a flash, a sheet of flame and smoke leaped to the ceiling. Mr. Bowser was in his slippers and just after the



burst of flame had singed off his eyebrows and curled his hair he felt something hot strike his feet. Mrs. Bowser heard a yell followed by a couple of jumps which jarred the house, but she sat still. She heard Mr. Bowser strike a chair and pitch over it, scramble up and bang open the back door, but she held her chair. Then she knew that he was galloping about the back yard, and she heard people crying "Fire!" but it was not until the firemen were banging away at the door that she rose up. The house was full of smoke and smell, but there was no fire. The firemen had been gone ten minutes, and most of the smell had floated out upon the night air, when Mr. Bowser entered the sitting room and stood before her. He was a dilapidated man. He had suffered for the cause of humanity. He lifted his right foot and his left foot—he gestured with his right arm and his left arm. He wanted to say something—he wanted to utter hundreds of words with six syllables, but his feelings overcame him.

"Yes, I know," quietly replied Mrs. Bowser as she looked at him. "Yes, you want to say that I made another attempt to assassinate you, and that the limit has been reached and divorce must follow, but you can't get it out. If I were you I'd go to bed."

And like one in a dream he dragged his legs after him from stair to stair, wondering and won-



THERE WAS A FLASH, A SHEET OF FLAME AND SMOKE  
LEAPED TO THE CEILING.



dering, but speaking no word, and an hour later, when Mrs. Bowser followed him, she found him in bed with the clothes drawn up to his chin and a look of benevolence on his face. He was dreaming of saving the lives of 5,000 of his fellow creatures annually, but as she gazed on him his toes began to twitch, the look of benevolence faded into one of surprise, and the odor of singed hair filled the room and made him sneeze in a lonesome way.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MR. BOWSER PLAYS A GAME OF GOLF.

The Bowsers had enjoyed a quiet hour after dinner the other evening when a dog was heard howling in front of the house and Mrs. Bowser suggested that the animal be driven away.

"By George, but that's a curious coincidence!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser as he got up. "It was only this afternoon that I was reading a long article on transmigration, and here a dog comes howling in front of my door."

"I don't see any curious coincidence about it," replied Mrs. Bowser. "If you had been reading a long article about Noah and his ark the dog would have come just the same. Please go out and club him away."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. How can we tell that the soul of some of our dead friends has not passed into that dog and returned to earth again?"

"Nonsense."

"You may sneer and sneer, but there are thousands who believe in transmigration. I'm almost a believer myself. Hear that howl? There's some-

thing about it to remind me of the voice of some one I have known. I won't do any driving away until I've had a look at the animal."

Mr. Bowser put on his hat and passed out. The dog sat at the gate and was getting ready for another howl, but choked it off into a whine as the door opened. As no clubs were thrown or cuss words used he made bold to jump the fence and enter the yard. He was a long, lank, ill-used bob-tailed dog, who had evidently cut loose from home and was free-lancing around the country. Mr. Bowser was about to utter a yell and scare the canine out of a year's growth when Mrs. Bowser spoiled it all by opening the door and demanding:

"Well, why don't you drive him away, or has he turned out to be an old friend of yours?"

Mr. Bowser snapped his fingers, and as the dog came trotting up the steps he was ushered into the hall and through to the sitting room. The family cat was lying under a chair and seemed asleep, but it didn't take her over the thousandth part of a second to wake up and light on that intruder. There was a mix-up for a few seconds, during which Mrs. Bowser ran upstairs. Mr. Bowser got up on a chair, and cat and dog rolled over each other on the floor. Then the cat flew upstairs after Mrs. Bowser, and the dog sat down and looked at Mr. Bowser and waited further instructions.

"What on earth did you do that for?" called Mrs. Bowser from the head of the stairs.

"Because I'm going to give this dog a show," answered Mr. Bowser. "I'm going to give him something to eat and then study him."

It happened to be the cook's night or there would have been a riot in the kitchen. As it was, Mr. Bowser cleared the pantry for the dog, and when there was nothing more to eat he returned to the sitting room. Mrs. Bowser came down just then to say:

"I never heard of such a silly thing in all my life. Why don't you turn him out?"

"Let me tell you something," replied Mr. Bowser. "There's a familiar look about that dog's face. There's an expression about the mouth which awakens a memory. Say, now, but just as true as you live one of the best friends I ever knew had just such an expression. Upon my word, I believe the soul of Will Taylor, who died two years ago, has passed into this dog!"

"Then it had better pass out again. I'll open the door and you jump at him."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. That expression almost clinches my belief in transmigration. Suppose it should be the soul of my dear friend come back to earth again? See him look at me. Why, woman, that dog seems to understand every word I say!"



"Well, you can talk over old times with him and I'll go up stairs," replied Mrs. Bowser. "If he suddenly runs mad and bites you don't blame any one but yourself."

"It's queer—mighty queer," mused Mr. Bowser after a long study of the dog's face. "That is Will Baker's mouth to a dot. If he has come back to earth in the form of a dog I'll not go back on him. A dog can't talk, but if this is poor Will there ought to be some way of making sure of it. Doggie——"

The dog didn't wait for him to finish. He lifted his head and indulged in a long-drawn howl which made things rattle.

"For heaven's sake, but what is going on down there?" shouted Mrs. Bowser.

"The dog howled. I was going to ask him if the soul of Will Baker had returned to earth in this form, when he ——"

There was another howl. It was louder and longer than the other, and there was something so uncanny about it that Mr. Bowser found chills racing up and down his back. He determined to turn the soul of Will Baker into the street forthwith, but he instantly discovered an obstruction in his path. The soul objected. That is, the dog stood firmly planted on his feet before him and not only howled again, but finished up with a menacing growl and a vigorous scratching of the carpet with all four feet.

"What is it now?" shouted Mrs. Bowser.

"The blamed cur won't let me move. I believe he's going mad! You'd better open a front window and yell for the police."

"We don't want to arouse the whole neighborhood and have them laughing at you. If that's the soul of your dearest friend he'll go out if you ask him to. Is the expression of the mouth the same as it was?"

"It's a heap worse. Can't you slip down and open the front door?"

Mrs. Bowser said she'd try it, but she didn't. The dog decided to take a view of the second story and made a start. She heard him coming and had just time to reach her bedroom and shut the door when he banged against it. He tore around for a minute or two and then got down stairs and drove Mr. Bowser on to the lounge and stood before him and growled and chuckled and gurgled in a way to freeze the blood. It was evident that the soul of Will Baker wasn't a gentle, peaceful soul. Mr. Bowser had shut his eyes and felt his helplessness when the family cat came to his rescue. She had been licked in the fight, but she had been taken by surprise and hadn't a fair show. Burning to recover her lost laurels after hiding for fifteen minutes under the bed, she had sneaked down stairs, and all of a sudden she landed on the dog's back. The soul of Mr. Bowser's old chum was both

pained and surprised at the sharpness of her teeth and the length of her claws. He made two turns around the sitting room, three around the parlor, and then there was a smash, a crash and a howl. With the cat clinging to his back and putting in ten hours a day, the dog had taken a header through a parlor window and the Bowsers were saved.

"And this," said Mrs. Bowser, as she got down stairs and found Mr. Bowser pale-faced and trembling and his knees bending under him—"this is transmigration, is it?"

"I thought—I thought——" he stammered, but she pointed to the broken window and interrupted:

"Yes, I know, and that's the result of it! You'd better let souls and dogs and transmigration alone and find some boards to nail over that till morning."

Mr. Bowser tried to work up a bluff and save his dignity, but it was a vain effort. There was a feeling as if a cold iron was being moved up and down his spine, and the wobble of his knees took his breath away.

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Mr. Bowser came home from the office two hours ahead of time the other day, and as Mrs. Bowser expressed her surprise and wanted to know if any calamity had happened, he replied:

"I've got that rheumatism back in my knees again, and I thought I'd work it out."

"You mean you are going to take massage?" she queried.

"Better than massage. I'm going to work the muscles, and thus work out the rheumatism. The trouble with me is that I haven't used my legs enough."

"But you don't mean that you are going to climb telegraph poles and jump over fences? If you have rheumatism in the knees why don't you rub on some liniment? If you go climbing around——"

"Who's going to climb?" demanded Mr. Bowser as his nose began to get red. "You talk as if I were a child or a fool. As for liniments, I've used a thousand different kinds, and what good have they done me? What I need, and the only thing to cure me, is a quick motion of the knees—so."

And he held up his right leg and worked his foot up and down to illustrate his meaning. Mrs. Bowser couldn't catch the idea, and he added:

"You've heard about golf, of course?"

"Yes."

"Great exercise. You use your brain and muscle at the same time. I'm going to practice a little at golf—fall and winter golf. Robinson had had rheumatism for twenty-eight years, and yet one hour at golf drove it completely out of his system. What I do this evening will be preliminary—just a

warning to my pains and aches of what is coming."

"But where are you going to per—perform?" she asked.

"Right out here in our own back yard," he answered. "In a week or so, after I get the hang of things, I shall go upon the links. You know what the links are, don't you? Even if you don't play golf you ought to post up on the terms. There's caddy, links, left-field, half-back, upper-cut, knuckle down, catch-as-catch-can and I don't know how many more. Robinson wrote 'em all down, and I'm going to commit 'em to memory."

"Well, you'll go ahead, of course, but something will happen."

"Yes, something will happen. I'll limber up my knees and be able to jump over the table when I come in. You oppose it, of course, just as you oppose everything else I do, but I'm not going to walk around on a pair of crow-bars to please you or anybody else."

Mrs. Bowser argued no further, and Mr. Bowser divested himself of coat, vest and hat, and carried a baseball bat and three or four croquet balls into the back yard. The golf sticks, the balls and the holes and the caddy were to come later on. Before beginning the performance he looked all around to see if the neighbors were interested. As far as he could observe they were not.<sup>1</sup> Not even the head

of a hoodlum showed above any of the line fences. Mrs. Bowser was looking out at him from a window, but that didn't count.

"If I'm going to work my knees I've got to get up a run," he mused as he spat on his hands and gripped the bat. "The idea is to whack a ball and follow it up and keep it going, and here goes."

He sent the ball flying over the grass as if shot from a cannon, and was after it full speed. It had not ceased rolling when he struck it again, and for five minutes he was jumping about like a man working for \$40 per day and board and washing thrown in. Then the ball took a fly and crashed through the basement window into the kitchen and struck the cook in the back. She uttered a yell of pain and surprise, and next instant appeared at the back door to exclaim:

"It's golf, is it! It's golf to hit a poor, hard-working girl in the back with a cannon-ball! Pay me my wages and I'll leave at once!"

Mrs. Bowser came down and Mr. Bowser came in, and Mrs. Bowser's sympathies, added to Mr. Bowser's promises to raise the girl's wages \$4 per month, finally brought about a sort of holy calm.

"You—you see," said Mrs. Bowser as he was ready to return to his golf.

"Yes, I see," he replied, "and my legs feel better than for a year before. That was simply an acci-



"IT'S GOLF, IS IT! IT'S GOLF."





dent. If she'd been attending to her business she'd have dodged."

Two minutes later he was knocking a ball about again, but by this time all the boys in the neighborhood had got on to the racket and were perched on the fences.

"What's de game, Cully?" called one.

"De old man has got de high-jinks!" shouted a second.

"Hully-gee, but he's as limber as an elephant!" yelled a third.

Mr. Bowser's play was to stand on his dignity and ignore the presence of spectators. He succeeded fairly well for a few minutes and gained unlimited applause. Then, having caught on to one-ball fall and winter golf, he became ambitious to spread himself. He got four balls in motion and followed them about, and his antics and exertions brought him a curtain call every thirty seconds. Mrs. Bowser had thrown up the window to give him another sort of call when the climax came. After giving one of the balls an awful whack he followed it on the jump. It struck the fence with a smash, which provoked enthusiastic and long-continued applause from the boys, but it bounded back on line with Mr. Bowser's solar-plexus, and when it struck him he threw up his hands and went down like a log. Twenty boys, Mrs. Bowser and the cook were surrounding the body a minute later. Mrs.

Bowser was agitated and the cook hysterical, but the boys were as cool as ice.

"De old coon's gone and yer a widder," remarked one in business-like tones.

"He'll never amble around in dis cold world no more," added a second.

"All de fun has bin razzle-dazzled, and I'ze goin' to move away!" sighed a third.

There was a clothes-basket, an old chair, a lawnmower and a hammock in the yard, and the boys gobbled them up and departed while Mrs. Bowser and the cook were working over Mr. Bowser. In the course of three or four minutes he opened his eyes.

"Well, have you got the rheumatism out of your knees?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

He did not answer. Presently he sat up, looked around, and it all came back to him. Then he got up and with unsteady gait made his way into the house.

"I feared at first that you were killed," remarked Mrs. Bowser as they reached the sitting room.

"You feared!" he shouted as he turned on her. "Why don't you say you hoped and expected, and that you are grievously disappointed! Who hit me in the back with a brick! Who tried daylight assassination! Woman, I understand—I have the proofs!"

"But the ball must have bounded back from the fence," she replied.

"That will do! I know all about bounding balls. It will take me about an hour or so to arrange the papers, and then, Mrs. Bowser—then would-be murderess and victim will go their separate ways! If any one calls I shall be in the library, and meanwhile you might occupy your time writing out your confession—your confession that it was a plot to murder me in cold blood!"

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"What have got there?" queried Mrs. Bowser, as Mr. Bowser made a great display of taking a package from his overcoat pocket, as he entered the house the other evening.

"Common prudence, madam," was his ambiguous reply.

"Common prudence in bottles?"

"Yes, in bottles. In other words, I have three or four articles for the family medicine chest. I happened to notice they were out, and so I had the bottles refilled."

"You still cling to that fad," she observed, as they went down to dinner.

"Fad! Fad!" he echoed. "After dinner I wish to have a little talk with you. It may be that saving our lives ten times over is a fad, but if so I don't understand it that way."

Nothing more was said on the subject until the

evening meal was disposed of and they had returned to the family room. Then Mr. Bowser got his medicine chest out of the closet, placed the bottles therein, and said:

"I figure up that this chest saves us about \$200 in doctor bills every year."

"When has it ever saved us from calling a doctor?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"Scores of times, madam. But for a remedy at hand at midnight our boy would have perished of the croup. Three or four times I have saved you from death. A dozen times in the last year I have slipped down here at night and taken something to ward off cholera or yellow fever. I wouldn't dare to go to bed without this chest in the house."

"I never took a dose from it, and never will, and if you keep on fooling around you'll make a fatal blunder some night. I wish you weren't such a queer man."

"Queer, eh?" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as his face began to get red. "Because a husband has the sense and foresight to provide against calamities he is a queer man! Now, listen to me. You are always pitching into me about this medicine chest, which, I reiterate, has saved our lives a dozen times over. I don't want to hear another word. If you are taken suddenly ill at midnight, then may the Lord help you, for you shan't have the benefit of this chest."

"I don't want it," she spiritedly replied.

"Very well; say no more about it. Here's a case in point at this very moment. Something eaten at dinner has given me a slight colic. A dose of Jamaica ginger will relieve me almost at once, save sending for the doctor, and cost about three cents."

Mrs. Bowser picked up a paper and began to read, and Mr. Bowser got a glass and some water and took his dose. Then he replaced the chest and sat down for a smoke, but his cigar was hardly alight before he gave a sudden start and turned pale. Mrs. Bowser was watching him out of the corner of her eye, and she quietly asked:

"Well, don't you feel better?"

"Say!" he replied, as he got up with a weakness of the knees, "that ginger has left a mighty curious taste behind in my mouth."

"Are you sure it was ginger you took?"

"Of course I am. That is——"

"That is what? Mr. Bowser! I told you you'd make a mistake some day and bring about a fatality, and now you've done it! How do you know you didn't take laudanum for ginger? Get down that chest at once!"

His hands shook and his knees wobbled as he lifted down the chest. He had placed a four-ounce vial of laudanum in it a few weeks before, and next day Mrs. Bowser had poured out the contents and refilled the bottle with strong coffee.

"Which bottle did you take your dose from?" she asked, as she opened the chest.

"This one," he replied, as he took up the ginger. He had, sure enough, but she realized that he doubted it, and it was an opportunity not to be lost.

"Mr. Bowser, are you certain sure? Your life may depend upon it."

"Why, I took up the bottle, and——and——"

"Yes, you took up the bottle—the first bottle you came to, and of course it was laudanum, instead of ginger! That dose was enough to kill an ox. Do you feel strange and queer?"

"Yes——I——do!" he gasped, as he tottered over and fell upon the lounge. "Go for a doctor, and get him here quick, or I'll be a dead man!"

Mrs. Bowser sent the cook around the corner, and ten minutes later the doctor arrived, and she had a few words to say to him before he was admitted to see the patient. Mr. Bowser was simply scared half to death. He knew in a general way how laudanum worked on the system, and he was dead sure that the dose was working on him.

"So your object was to save doctor's bills," queried the doctor, as he felt of the pulse.

"I——I want something done at once!" groaned Mr. Bowser.

"Oh, we'll do the best we can, of course, and I



hope it is not too late. How much per year has that medicine chest saved you?"

"Not a blamed cent, and please get to work on me!"

"I hear that you have warded off cholera and yellow fever several times," continued the doctor, as he turned up Mr. Bowser's eyelids.

"Yes——no! No, I never have! I feel awful strange!"

"I presume so, but what if Mrs. Bowser happens to be taken seriously ill at night?"

"I'll get a doctor——two of 'em! Say, can't something be done for me?"

The doctor thought there could. He wrote a prescription to be filled at once, and the cook, whose young man happened to call, sent him up stairs to walk Mr. Bowser up and down the house for the next two hours. The doctor talked about a stomach pump at first, but finally concluded not to use it. He, however, insisted that Mr. Bowser be kept on the move, and that a shake and a thump be administered at intervals, and just before midnight he was pronounced out of danger and sent to bed. He felt that he had been drawn back from the grave, and was very humble, but after sleeping for three hours he awakened Mrs. Bowser to say:

"Woman, we will call in a lawyer the first thing in the morning to settle this matter!"

"W——what matter?" she sleepily asked.

"I understand all! You poured the laudanum into the glass when my back was turned, but later on got conscience-stricken about it. Yes, in the morning we will call in a lawyer and fix things. That is, unless you have a plan to murder me in—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" interrupted Mrs. Bowser, and he fell back on his pillow and went into dreamland, to sigh and moan and snore and dream that a family medicine chest with eight legs was running him through the woods, and would give him no rest.

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Mr. Bowser was due at his home at six o'clock and Mrs. Bowser was wondering what sort of a new fad he would bring with him when he suddenly opened the door. As he didn't give the door a kick and a bang when he opened it, she knew that he hadn't had a row with the street car conductor en route. As he was humming a tune to himself, she knew that he hadn't found a clothespin or a shirt button on the steps and would bring no charge of reckless extravagance against her.

"Ha! little woman, but here you are!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of her. "Dinner's all ready, of course? You never keep me waiting, and you always have something good. I never come home without patting myself on the back over my good luck. Everything gone all right with you to-day?"

It wasn't an extra good dinner. The butcher

had sent a poor roast, and the cook had had trouble with the range, but as Mr. Bowser plied his knife and fork he complimented everything. He also complimented Mrs. Bowser on her personal appearance and the cook on her culinary skill. Mrs. Bowser was glad to see him in such good spirits, and yet she was uneasy. As dinner was ended she almost hoped to hear him say he was going around to the club for an hour or two. He had no such idea in his head, however. As he reached the sitting room he took off his shoes, lighted a cigar and dropped into a chair, with the observation:

"Well, but this is home! This is the way for a man to live! A man who has a home like this ought to be kicked for complaining about anything. Did I leave you any shopping money this morning?"

"I—I think not," she replied.

"Then I must have forgotten it. I meant to have left you \$20. Just put me in mind of it tomorrow, will you? By George, but how neat and cosy this room looks! We ought to have a little more light, though."

"I'm trying to keep the gas bills down, you know."

"Never you mind the gas bills, little one," he said, as he rose up and lighted all the burners. "You are naturally saving, but there's no need of pinching. Just use all the gas you want to and don't scrimp

on coal. Didn't I see you fixing up a dress the other evening?"

"I was altering it over in hopes to make it do," she exclaimed.

"Well, throw it away and go down and get a new one. I want to see you well dressed, and there's no call to alter old garments. Go to the best dress-maker and have the latest style."

"You are awfully kind and good!" she murmured, as she forgot the peril of the situation for a moment.

"No thanks, please. You deserve all I can do for you. If there's a better little wife in all this big world, I'd like to hear of her. The trouble is that I don't half appreciate you. Only the other day I was thinking things over and I realized to the fullest extent that but for your influence I should never have been the man I am. I've made blunders enough, heaven knows, but if it hadn't been for you I should have made hundreds more. Just think of the tomfool fads I have indulged in, will you?"

"They weren't so very foolish," she protested.

"You say that to let me down easy, but I realize how often I have made an ass of myself. Ah, there's the cat! Kitty, kitty, kitty!"

The cat came out from under the lounge and sprang to Mr. Bowser's knees, and he stroked her back and toyed with her ears and said:

"Just a cozy little family, aren't we? Do you remember that one night about two weeks ago we differed as to how to spell the word 'waggon?' I said there was only one 'g' in it, and you said there was two. I want to ask your forgiveness. Of course you were right."

"There's nothing to forgive," replied Mrs. Bowser. "People are often mistaken about a word."

"But I got mad and called you an idiot. I wish some one had been at hand to kick me. About that last coal bill—I said we had burned a ton a week and jumped up and down and bulldozed around, and it's a wonder you kept your temper as you did. Please forgive me for that."

"You thought you were right."

"Yes, but I made a fool of myself, as I had a hundred times before. Even if we had used a ton a week you couldn't help it. You don't make the weather. If there was ever a wife who looked after things around the house with a determination to help her husband it is you. I don't believe two cents' worth of stuff is wasted in a year."

"I try to do my best," she responded, but at the same time wishing that Jones or Brown would come in and interrupt the conversation.

"Do you remember the night I came home and found a clothespin on the doorstep?" continued Mr. Bowser, with evident enjoyment. "I busted into the hall and made as much fuss over that old

clothespin as if it had been a diamond sunburst. I stamped around and shouted and bulldozed and spoiled the whole evening. Mrs. Bowser, why didn't you bristle up to me and tell me to shut right up or you'd leave? If you had hit me with a crow-bar that night, it would have served me right. Have you—can you ever forgive me?"

"There was a strange man here this afternoon," she said, determined to break up the conversation at all hazards, "and I think he wanted to see you about land."

"Well, let him come when I'm home. I believe you told me not long ago that you had saved all my old love letters. Suppose you get 'em all 'down, and we'll read 'em over."

"I—I don't think I could find them to-night. Shall we run into Brown's for an hour?"

"I am too comfortable to go out. Wasn't it funny about my trying that barefoot cure? When a man starts in to make a fool of himself the way I do every little while, somebody ought to take a club to him. If I bring a baseball bat home, will you whack me with it the first time I act like an idiot?"

Mrs. Bowser was about to make an excuse to leave the room when the cook came up with a bill. It was a balance of thirty-one cents owing the butcher. Mr. Bowser was smiling all over as she handed it to him, but no sooner had he glanced





"DEBTS, DEBTS, DEBTS!"





over it than a thundercloud took the place of his smile, and he shouted:

"What's this? What's this? You've been running in debt again!"

"The butcher couldn't change a bill," explained Mrs. Bowser.

"Debts, debts, debts!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser as he flung the cat half way across the room and jumped up and swung his arms in the air. "Woman, haven't I warned you a million times about this reckless extravagance? If I gave you \$1,000 a week to run this house on, you'd still be in debt! Of all the extravagant, reckless spendthrifts I ever saw, you are the worst!"

"But it wasn't running in debt. I had a bill, and he couldn't change it. I expected to pay it to-morrow."

"What's to-morrow got to do with it? I tell you not to run in debt, and you defy me. I'm looking at the principle of the thing. Mrs. Bowser, this is too much—too much!"

"You are getting excited over nothing," she replied. "We had to have meat, and the butcher couldn't change a \$10 bill."

"Wreck, ruin and the poorhouse!" he groaned as he walked about. "It's no wonder I'm old and bent and gray before my time. Thousands of clothespins on the front steps, tons of broken dishes in the back yard—waste and extravagance every-

where! And you sit there—and you sit there and smile over it! Woman, I won't stand it! I am about to retire to the library. I desire to arrange my business affairs and see if I've got two cents left. While I am doing so you can break up the chairs, smash the piano and kick holes in the carpet. Good night, madam!"

And when he had gone the cat came over and sat down beside Mrs. Bowser and looked up into her face and smiled with her.

## CHAPTER X.

### HE TOYS WITH AN ELECTRIC BATTERY.

A certain nervousness on Mr. Bowser's part as he sat reading the evening paper and smoking a cigar prepared Mrs. Bowser for an announcement of some sort. She knew that he had brought home a package under his arm, but had refrained from asking any questions. After hitching around on his chair for awhile and commenting on the news he drew a long breath and said:

"I had my blood tested to-day by a doctor who happened to drop into the office, and it was a good thing I did. Another week and it might have been too late."

"Too late for what?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

"Too late to save my life. That is, I should have had to go to the hospital and be operated on for cancer of the stomach. I just caught it in time."

"It was very lucky that some quack came in with something to sell."

"Quack! Quack!" shouted Mr. Bowser, as he jumped up and got mad in a breath. "That's you

exactly. You can't be happy unless you are ringing in something about quacks and fads and fakirs about once a week. It has got so that I dread to even tell you that I've got a corn on my toe or a cold in the head. If you are ailing I can't sleep for my anxiety, but if you knew that I was standing on the verge of the grave you'd fling out some insult or other."

"Well, you had your blood tested," she quietly answered.

"Yes, I did. You know how I've been run down for the last year, and I wanted to know just what ailed me. It didn't take the doctor over five minutes to find that my system needed electricity. For the want of electricity my blood is turning to water."

"And so you bought a battery, of course?"

"Yes, I bought a battery."

"Of the doctor who found your blood was turning to water?"

"Why not? He happened to have one with him, and why shouldn't I buy it?"

"No reason at all, my dear. I suppose it is on the hall-tree, and that you intend taking a treatment right away? I think you had better. I once knew a man who's blood turned to water and he went insane and died. I have heard that electricity restored youth. Perhaps it will work that way in your case."

Mr. Bowser looked at her for a long minute without being able to make up his mind whether she was guying or in earnest, but being unable to detect a smile on her face he finally brought in his battery. It was a simple affair, which was set in operation by a spring, and he soon had it in working order. When the current began making itself felt in his hands and arms he grew good-natured and blandly said:

"This is worth all the medicine I could pour down my throat in a year. Our family doctor has been dosing and doping me for months without avail, because he didn't know what ailed me. It never occurred to him to set my blood. Ah—um! Say, this does me good!"

"I suppose it restores certain lost properties to the blood?" eagerly observed Mrs. Bowser.

"That's what it does. What my blood lacks is phosphates. You must fertilize the blood the same as you would the soil. By George, but I can feel it clear up to my ears! I honestly believe that one single treatment will carry me back fifteen or twenty years. You know that when Pliny was eighty years old he used electricity and joined a football club."

"I never heard of it, but I hope it will affect you favorably. I have noticed lately that you drag your legs in going up stairs."

"Well, there will be no more drag after to-night.

On the contrary, I'll be bounding up four stairs at a time. When I get through you'd better take a treatment. There's nothing like taking time by the forelock. The subtle fluid has not been permeating my system above five minutes, and yet I feel as if I could jump over a six-rail fence."

For the next three minutes Mr. Bowser leaned back and closed his eyes and had a lamb-like look on his face. Then the monotonous whirr of the battery suddenly changed to a series of gasps as if for breath, and he straightened up with a yell and began to beat his heels on the floor.

"What on earth's the matter!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowser, as she reached over and turned the spring and shut the current off.

"The blamed thing got away somehow!" he gasped, as he let the handles fall. "The doctor said something about induction, and I guess that was it. Perhaps I've got enough in my arms. For a few seconds I thought it would pull every tooth out of my head. Say, now, but before I try it on my legs I'll experiment a little on the cat."

"But you may scare her to death."

"She won't scare for a cent. Say, it will be a good thing for her. She's been growing lean and scrawny for the last month, and electricity may be just what she needs. Her blood may need phosphates as well as mine. Is the cook home?"

"Yes, but don't you go experimenting on her.





THE SUDDEN ATTACK ROLLED HIM UPON THE FLOOR.



If she got a shock she'd bring a lawsuit for damages."

"And why don't you try it?"

"Because I don't need it. If that thing runs away again it may tie you up in knots. It was lucky I happened to be here to turn the spring."

"Well, we'll see how it will work on the cat. Even if her blood is not impoverished she needs toning up. Come here, pussy."

The family cat came over to him without hesitation, and as she reached his feet he started the battery and clapped a sponge to each of her sides. For about thirty seconds the cat humped her back, rolled her eyes and wondered over the new sensation. Then she seemed to get the idea that she was being attacked by other cats, and that it was to be a fight for life. Her first spring carried her on Mr. Bowser's knees, and the next to the top of his head, and the sudden attack rolled him out of the chair upon the floor. He yelled and the cat squealed. He pounded at her and she clawed. The fight was over in a minute, with the cat shooting up stairs to hide under a bed, but in those sixty seconds Mr. Bowser had received a dozen bites and a score of scratches. He scrambled up with the blood flowing from his wounds and his dignity all torn up the back, and his first act was to dash the battery to the floor and jump on it with both feet. His next was to yell at Mrs. Bowser:

"Woman, I'll wreck this house from cellar to garret! You knew all the time——"

But Mrs. Bowser wasn't there. She had followed the cat up stairs. His first thought was to rush after her, but as he reached the stairs he paused with a new idea. Murder would not satisfy his thirst.

"Woman, hear me!" he called. "To-morrow morning—my lawyer—your lawyer—divorce—no alimony, and you and your blamed old cat may starve in the streets and die in the poorhouse!"

---

It had been arranged that Mrs. Bowser and the lady next door should attend to some church matters in the evening and that the lady's four-year-old son should be the guest of Mr. Bowser and the cat for a couple of hours. The little fellow looked around in a dubious way as he was brought over, but fell asleep before the ladies got away and was tucked up on the lounge.

"Don't you worry in the slightest," said Mr. Bowser to the mother. "If he happens to wake up, I'll do everything to amuse him. I always loved children, and they have always taken to me. Bless his little heart, but I wish he hadn't fallen asleep."

Five minutes later the front door closed on his mother, and the boy awoke. He didn't awake with the languid gentleness of a rabbit, but all of a sudden he sat up with a howl of affright. The howls

ran from No. 1 to No. 17 before Mr. Bowser could realize the situation, and the family cat who had been prowling around the room, made a dive for the hall and appeared totally panic stricken.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the next ten minutes Mr Bowser tried hard to be a mother to that boy. He drummed on the piano, knocked on the window and cavorted about the room. He handed over his watch, his wallet, his keys and his knife. He ran to the kitchen for sugar, tea, coffee, starch and baking powder. Anything and everything was at the disposal of that boy until he ceased to howl and sob.

"Me want story," he said, as he dug the tears out of his eyes with his fists.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thereupon Mr. Bowser told him the following story: "Once upon a time there was a bobtailed dog. He was spotted. He was three years old. He loved bones and meat and fried oysters and ice cream. He had no mother or father, but was not a dog to do wicked things. He didn't swear or chew or drink, and he was no liar. There were dogs who wanted to fight with him, but he would not fight. When they came around and said they could knock his eyebrows off and roll him in the mud, he jumped over the fence and ran away. Well, things went on this way for a long time, and then—and then——"

\* \* \* \* \*

And then the boy began howling because there was no more bobtailed dog. Mr. Bowser got the cat in, but the howls continued; then he got down on hands and knees and said he was a horse, but that wouldn't work. He got out a book with pictures, sang "Rock-a-by Baby" and whistled "Yankee Doodle," and after ten minutes' work thrown away he was greeted with that same tearful remark:

"Me want story!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Thereupon Mr. Bowser, who had wilted his collar and busted the straps on his vest with his exertions, sat down and began: "There was once a bear. He went around looking for boys who cried. (Howls of fear from the boy.) No; I mean he went around looking for girls on roller skates. This bear lived in the woods, and he was not afraid of either man or guns. Whenever he caught a boy—— (Howls.) I mean, whenever he caught a girl he would carry her off to his den and eat her up at two mouthfuls. In one year that bear ate up 10,000 girls. One day when there were no girls about and he was very hungry he thought he would eat a boy. (Awful howls.) Hold on, now! I'm going to tell you how the boy killed the bear. You see——"

\* \* \* \* \*

But the boy refused to see. He'd heard bear

stories before, and he knew that there was a screw loose somewhere. He sat up and howled, and he lay down and howled, and the cat fled in terror, and Mr. Bowser felt chills go up his back. There was more lively drumming on the piano, more wild gallops around the room, more singing and whistling. Exercise in a gymnasium couldn't compare to it, but there were only two ways to stop that howling. The boy must be either choked to death or hear another story.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Bowser wasn't quite ready yet to do murder, and so he gaspingly began: "Well, you know, there was once a boy named Willie Scott. (The howls ceased.) He had a goat. It was a black goat. You've seen a goat, of course. He had horns and climbed over fences. This goat loved the boy because he was so kind to it. Some boys would hit a goat with a crowbar if they got mad, but Willie never even struck his goat with a stick. If ever you get a goat and want him to love you, don't abuse him. A goat has feelings as well as a boy. Well, one day Willie and his goat were out on the sidewalk, and along came a lion. The lion was hungry and wanted to eat the boy up. The boy began to cry, but the goat said to him—Let's see. What did the goat say? I don't remember just what he said, but—but——"

\* \* \* \* \*



There was no finis, and there were howls and sobs and lamentations from the kid on the lounge. He wanted to know whether the goat ate up the lion or the lion ate up the boy, and Mr. Bowser had left it all a mystery. He was picked up and danced around the room, but he added kicks to his howls. He was carried up stairs and down stairs, but he would not be quiet. There came half-formed ideas of throwing him out of a back window or chucking him into the coal bin, but he was at length returned to the lounge.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then Mr. Bowser swore about forty swear words to himself and began: "You know that a boy should always mind what his father and mother tell him. (Howls cease.) If he doesn't, then he is a bad boy and something will happen to him. I once knew a boy whose name was Sammy. He was about as old as you are and about as mean. One day he wanted to throw the clock out of the window, but his mother said: 'Sammy, don't do that. If you do a wolf will come and eat you up.' What did that boy do? He waited until his mother went down to the store, and then he threw the clock out. He didn't believe that a wolf would come, but that same afternoon, when he was playing in the back yard, a great big wolf, with eyes as big as teacups and a tail ten feet long, jumped over the back fence and growled and growled, and the boy yelled for

his mother, and the wolf showed his teeth, and—  
and—well, that's all."

\* \* \* \* \*

But it wasn't. That wolf either ate that boy up or he didn't, and the youngster on the lounge wanted to know. He began howling with redoubled vigor, and Mr. Bowser determined on his death. He wouldn't kill him in the house, but he would take him to the river and cast him in. He had just picked the howler up and got him under his arm, and the cat was looking on with great satisfaction, when the ladies returned and the murder was prevented.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Woman," said Mr. Bowser, after the mother of the child had departed with him in her arms, "the law will probably allow you alimony!"

"But what for?" she asked.

"Divorce!" he hoarsely replied. "The limit has been reached. My lawyer will serve the papers on your lawyer to-morrow, and you can go home to your mother by the ten o'clock train."

---

There was a sort of three-ply, back-action, double combination look on Mr. Bowser's face as he entered the house the other evening, and for the life of her Mrs. Bowser couldn't make out whether he had fallen heir to a fortune or decided to run for office. In this situation she wisely held her peace,

and asked no questions even when she discovered that he had brought home a package. He vouchsafed no information, but during the dinner hour was preoccupied and exultant by turns. When they had adjourned to the family room he was ready to explain, and he softly began:

"Mrs. Bowser, with your permission I want to try a little experiment this evening."

"Is it connected with that package you brought home?" she cautiously asked.

"Somewhat. You know how my shoulders have pained me of late? There are mornings when I can scarcely raise my hand to button my collar. I haven't said much to you about it, but——"

"I never heard you complain of your back and shoulders," she interrupted. "Only last night you wanted to move the furniture in our bedroom about, and you said you felt like turning hand-springs."

"If I haven't complained," he continued, as he preserved his good nature, "it was because I didn't care to worry you. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Bowser—a matter of medical fact—I am what is called shoulder-bound. That is, rheumatism has seized upon and contracted my muscles, and if something is not done paralysis will eventually overtake me. If I get a stroke of paralysis you will become a widow."

“And you must stand on your head or climb up the side of the house to ward it off?”

“No, ma’am. The remedy is very simple. Half an hour’s work for a few evenings will fix me all right. I met a professional athlete to-day, and after examining my condition he told me just what to do. However, if you have the slightest objection—if you want to see me become a victim of the dread paralysis——”

“What did he tell you to do?” she asked.

Mr. Bowser went to the hall-tree and got his package and returned with it and held it up and replied:

“Simplest thing in the world. It is called a punching bag. You inflate it and hang it up and punch it. The exercise benefits every muscle in the back and shoulders. It only cost \$3, and I’ll get \$500 worth of good out of it. It would also be a good thing for you to practice on. If you don’t object I will inflate it and hang it up and pound it a little this evening.”

“Well, go ahead,” she sighed, “but don’t blame me.”

“Blame you about what? How can I blame you? What can happen? I simply hang the bag on the chandelier, remove my coat and vest and punch it. Nothing can be more simple. You don’t expect I’m going to knock the house down, do you?”

Mrs. Bowser relapsed into silence, while he went ahead with the inflating. When the bag was ready he hung it up on the chandelier and removed his coat and vest. He had carried his point without much opposition and was bland over it.

"Now, then," he said, as he spat on his palms and made ready, "you watch how I do it. It is the greatest exercise in the world. It is warranted to cure dyspepsia, indigestion, neuralgia and so forth, and to straighten up the spine and give a man a military carriage. It is practiced in every college and seminary in the land, and there are few homes without their punching bags. You see, I stand this way—and I reach out this way—and I biff! bang! with my left——"

The biff! bang! was a "swat" which would have busted the panel of a door. The ball shot away and upwards as if fired from a cannon, and about half the glass ornaments of the chandelier came rattling down on the floor. Mrs. Bowser cried out in alarm and made a rush for the parlor, but Mr. Bowser laughed and reassured her and added:

"I guess I overdid it a little for the first blow. I'll make a rat-tat-tat of it."

He played with the ball for about a minute and the rest of the trimmings and two of the globes came raining down. The other globes would have followed had not Mrs. Bowser uttered words of

STATE OF ILLINOIS,

.....County,

} I, .....  
SS. do hereby certify that  
No. ....

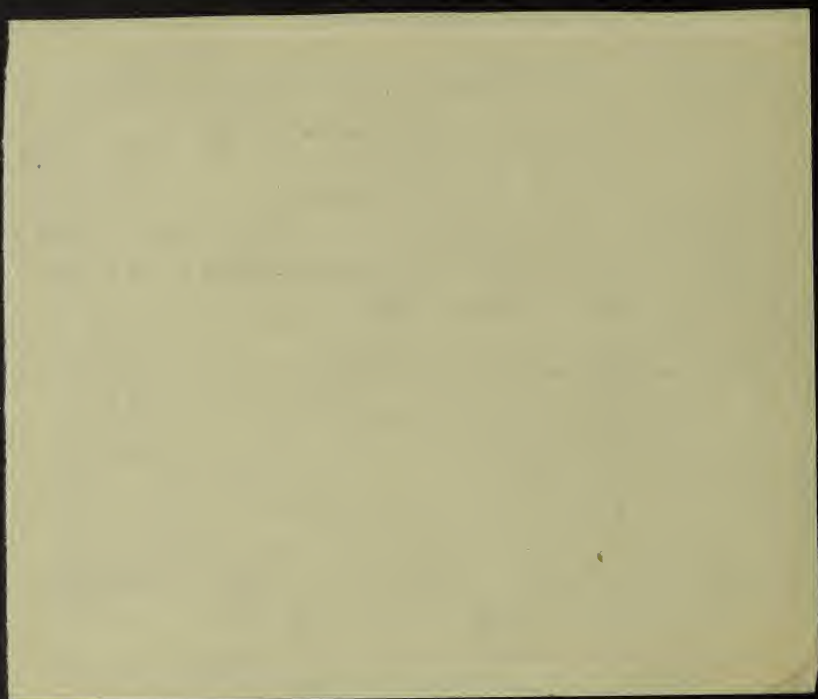
of .....County of .....

tures on this sheet were signed in my presence and are genuine, and  
were at the time of signing said petition, qualified voters of the .....  
correctly stated, as above set forth.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this.....

day of .....A. D. 19 .....

SHEET NO.....







HALF THE CHANDELIER CAME RATTLING DOWN.



vigorous protest. With the perspiration running down his face he paused to reply:

"Never mind a few cents' damages. This is great work. I'm feeling a movement of muscles which have been dormant for months. Perhaps you'd better go upstairs and avoid the racket, and I'll hitch the bag to that telephone wire on the ceiling."

Mrs. Bowser promptly disappeared, and he got the stepladder and gave the bag a hang from the wire. When he squared off before it again he was alone and untrammelled, and he meant to knock seven bells out of something. The bag had a long play, and as he hauled off on it there was a crash against the ceiling and a rebound that made him see stars. In coming back the bag struck him fair in the face, and for a minute he looked around to see the horse which had kicked him

"I'm on to that little curve," he muttered, as he got ready for the next round. "I remember now, the professional told me the object was to punch and dodge, the same as if scrapping with a man. Well, here goes."

Mr. Bowser had never studied the elusive tactics of the punching bag. Mrs. Bowser, who was waiting at the head of the stairs for a calamity, heard him thump and grunt four or five times and then begin to dance about. About a minute later there was a crash and she called down;

"Have you knocked a side out of the house, Mr. Bowser?"

Mr. Bowser hadn't. In his dodging about he had encountered a chair and fallen over it, and had come down so heavily that a referee would have counted him out. It was a long minute before he got up, and then his good nature had departed. No punching bag ever made by mortal man could knock him about with impunity. He rose up with a determination to collapse that bag with one awful blow. He had been warned to go easy, but his outraged dignity demanded revenge. Mrs. Bowser heard him tapping the bag with his left to get it in motion, and then she heard him draw a long breath like a horse going up hill as he hauled off to deliver the knockout blow with his right. As he jumped in to deliver the blow he had to dodge the bag, and there was a thump against the wall which rattled things clear to the garret, followed by a howl, a stagger and a fall. She got down stairs in a breath, and found Mr. Bowser lying across the foot of the lounge, with the bag playing pendulum above him. His awful blow had missed it and landed on the wall, and his good right hand was already puffing up to beat a cabbage head.

"What—what has happened?" she asked as she thought of arnica and bandages and slings.

Mr. Bowser struggled up like a stricken ox, and

he looked from his broken knuckles to the dent in the wall—from the swinging bag to Mrs. Bowser and up to the despoiled chandelier. She was prepared for a furious outburst, but none came. After a long minute he quietly but sternly said:

“Woman, return to your room! In the morning all will be settled. You were against me and you crept down stairs and struck me with a chair, but our lawyers will settle all that and you can start for your mother’s by the noon train. No more, woman—not another word! You have failed again, but this is the last time—the last time, and good night to you—good night!”

---

Mr. Bowser was unusually good-natured as he came home the other evening, and though the dinner was a little off, owing to a change of cooks, he praised everything and criticised nothing. Mrs. Bowser was gratified, but yet at the same time a little distrustful. The husband who is too good is a dangerous man. She was wondering whether he was going to propose a visit to a roof-garden or getting ready to find fault with the gas-bill, when they finished dinner, and as they went up stairs he picked up a blue card from the floor and sat down to read the words printed thereon. It was a soap advertisement. In order to quickly introduce it to the kitchens of the public the maker had selected twenty-eight misspelled words and

offered a bar of soap to all who would correct them and hand in the card to the nearest grocer.

"What won't they get up next?" laughed Mr. Bowser, as his interest in the card increased. "You don't seem to have corrected any of the words!"

"The grocer's boy left it, and I never pay any attention to those things," replied Mrs. Bowser, but at the same time feeling a sinking of the heart. Mr. Bowser was just as sure to go into orthography as the night was to fall, and she would have given her pin-money for a month if he had not seen the card.

"Twenty-eight misspelled words, eh?" he mused, as he felt for his pencil. "Bet you five dollars to one that I can correct them all in ten minutes."

"It's only for children, you know. It's such a nice, cool evening that I hoped you might want to go out somewhere."

"Yes, we'll go, but let me dash off these words first. It's rather a cute idea to interest the children in soap. Ha! ha!"

"Why not leave that for to-morrow evening?" suggested Mrs. Bowser, as she reached out for the card.

"Oh, we've got lots of time. Say, it's a fake affair after all. He has spelled the word 'seperately' right in his misspelled words. It's a shame to swindle innocent children this way, and he ought

to be exposed. Let's see if you would have caught on. How do you spell seperately?"

"I—I don't feel like spelling to-night. Let's go out and get the air."

"But here's a swindle on innocent childhood, Mrs. Bowser, and it is your duty to assist in exposing it. Spell the word."

She saw that she was in for it, and she sat down with a groan and spelled it s-e-p-a-r-a-t-e-l-y.

"What! What!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser. "Did you spell it with an 'e' or an 'a'?"

"With an 'a,' of course."

"Then you are a party to the swindle! I have lived in this world for forty-eight years, and it has always been spelled with an 'e' by honest people. By what authority do you put an 'a' in it?"

"I presume I was wrong," she answered, hoping to dodge the question.

"Oh, you do? Well, it's something to own up. Let's see what Webster says. P. Q. R. S.—here it is. By George, but he's got an 'a' in it! Say, now, but I want to understand this matter! Do you spell 'seperately' with an 'a'?"

"Som—sometimes."

"Don't fool with me, Mrs. Bowser. Here is a soap-maker who deliberately puts out a swindle on childhood, and our family grocer is in partnership with him. So is old Noah Webster, and so are you. I say that 'seperately' is spelled with an 'e.'



I once took the prize at a spelling-school on that word, and I've written it with an 'e' in 'law, insurance and real estate papers a million times. By what right do you and old Webster spell it with an 'a'?"

"Because that's the correct way, and you'll find it so in every dictionary in the land," replied Mrs. Bowser.

"Oh! I will! That is to say I have been wrong all these years, have I? Not on your life! Hand me that newspaper. I'll find the word and prove I'm right a hundred times over!"

After hunting for a minute, Mr. Bowser came across the word. It was spelled according to Webster and Mrs. Bowser. He was pale-faced as he glared at her and swallowed a lump in his throat, and his voice was hardly above a whisper as he finally said:

"I will look into this contemptible swindle to a further degree to-morrow, and if I don't have some one in jail before Saturday night you can call me a goat. Meanwhile, here is another catch. How do you spell the word 'unrivalled'?"

"What is the use of fussing with an old soap advertisement when we might go out and enjoy a pleasant evening?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she rose up.

"The use is that this soap-maker, assisted by hundreds of grocers, has been putting out a swin-

dle on the people, and it is my duty and your duty to help expose him. How do you spell the word?"

"With one 'l'."

"Then you are also in the swindle and ought to be sent to prison! Webster and every other authority on the face of this globe spells it with two 'l's'. I was looking it up for Brown only a week ago. How many bars of soap were you to get for being a partner in this swindle?"

Mrs. Bowser turned to Webster and pointed out the word. It was spelled with one "l" only.

"Then he's a liar and a fraud!" shouted Mr. Bowser, as he smote the big book with his fist. "The copy I consulted last week had two 'l's' in it as big as a house. So he's in the soap swindle with the rest of you! There's a silver medal in my desk I won on spelling that word when I was twenty years old, and now you and Webster and some soap man pretend that I'm all wrong!"

Mrs. Bowser looked into the back yard and held her peace and mentally vowed to cut off the ears of that grocery boy the next time he showed up, and Mr. Bowser walked up and down and snorted his disgust. By and by he said:

"Perhaps you'll tell me that I have been wrong all these years in spelling the word 'discriptive' with an 'i' in the first syllable?"

"I presume lots of people spell it that way," she answered.

"But do you and Webster and the soap-maker contend that it's wrong?" he insisted.

"Yes; we spell it with an 'e'."

He picked up the dictionary and looked to see. It was spelled with an 'e'. He carried the volume to the open window and heaved it into the back yard, and turning on Mrs. Bowser he asked:

"Do you know what I was going to do to-night?"

"No."

"I was going to take you to a roof-garden for a couple of hours, and then have an elegant supper afterwards."

"I should have enjoyed it."

"Your birthday comes to-morrow. When we got home I should have put a seven-stone diamond ring on your finger as a present."

"How sweet of you!"

"And having made an extra hundred dollars to-day, I was calculating to divide with you."

"But now?" she asked.

"But now I don't! No roof-garden—no supper—no diamonds—no cash! A woman who will coolly and deliberately enter into partnership with old Webster, a soap-maker and a grocer to beat and swindle and defraud innocent little children is no wife of mine!"

"But I had to spell correctly," she protested.

"That is another insult, Mrs. Bowser—another



HE HEAVED THE VOLUME INTO THE BACK YARD.



insult. I am going out. I shall probably drop you a line from some hotel. I wish you a separately and an un-ri-valed and a des-scriptive good-evening!"

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That Mr. Bowser had something on his mind was plain enough to Mrs. Bowser, the moment he entered the house, and all through the dinner hour she saw that he was anxious to communicate it, but she expressed no curiosity and held him off until they were seated for the evening. Then she carelessly inquired if he had discovered a new spring and summer tonic.

"I shall have callers this evening," he said, as he smiled at her benignly, "and the result of the call may change our whole life."

"What sort of callers?"

"Gentlemen, of course. There will be from three to five. Yes, this evening may be considered an epoch in our history."

"If there are any epochs going on, I should like to know what they are. Hadn't you better explain matters?"

Mr. Bowser walked up and down for a few minutes with dignified tread, and the family cat, which had been sleeping on the lounge, opened one eye in a lazy way and watched his movements. By and by he turned and said:

"Mrs. Bowser, you are no politician, of course,

but you may possibly understand that just at this moment the politics of this country is corrupt beyond comparison."

"I think I understand that," she replied.

"Unless a change is made for the better we shall be disgraced before the eyes of the world as a nation. What we want is a wave of reform."

"And are you going to start the wave?" she sarcastically queried.

"I—I am—that is, I probably am. The gentlemen are coming here this evening to talk about it. If, in their judgment, I am the proper person, I shall have the honor of setting the wave in motion. I am for honest politics and a pure administration."

"I thought it was some such nonsense," she slowly replied. "On three or four occasions you have mixed in politics and made a donkey of yourself, but it seems you haven't got enough."

"There you go! That's you!" he exclaimed in tones which jumped the cat to the floor. "If I had a plan to put a Bible into the hands of every heathen on earth, you'd oppose it. I was an ass to say anything to you about it."

"Mr. Bowser, you have been voting for thirty years. Have you ever known honest reform in politics?"

"Of course I have!"

"Never! There is no such thing. It's the same



thing over and over again each year. If anybody has made you believe that you can bring about any change for the better, they have taken you for a fool. Why, when they wanted you to run for Alderman in this ward on a reform ticket, they wanted a fund of \$1,000 to buy up votes and pay saloon bills!"

"But this is different," he protested. "What is wanted is moral influence. Let twenty-five good men band together to purify politics, and the movement will spread from State to State in a week. It isn't a question of money, but of character. I am simply to lend my influence--to be one of the stepping stones, as it were."

"Well, you'll get stepped on fast enough. Your committee is ringing the doorbell, and I'll go upstairs. Don't get so excited over reform as to put a mortgage on the furniture."

Mr. Bowser received the committee. There were five of them. They were headed by an ex-Alderman who had deliberately sacrificed a \$2 ticket to a boxing match in the interests of political reform. Even before all the gentlemen had taken their seats he whispered in Mr. Bowser's ear:

"Say, old man, if you want this movement to be a success you want to bring up decanter and glasses. The boys are expecting something at least seven years old."

Mr. Bowser turned pale, but said nothing in re-

ply. Neither did he produce the antidote for dry cotton. When the committee were seated he looked them over and mentally rejoiced that Mrs. Bowser had not caught sight of them. Then he said:

"Gentlemen, as I was given to understand this thing this afternoon, the idea is reform in politics."

"That's it," chorused the five.

"We propose to start a wave of reform which shall roll from Maine to Texas?"

"We do."

"I am no politician, as I informed your delegate. I have never held a political office in my life. There have been years at a time when I have not even gone to the polls to vote."

"But you are an honest, respectable man and desire honest methods," said the ex-Alderman.

"Yes, I can say that."

"Then you are the man for us, and we'll figure a bit. You don't happen to have anything in the house to drink, eh?"

"I haven't."

"You ought to have prepared for the wave of reform, but we can all go out to a saloon after the business is done. I've got our ward ticket made out. You see, the boys want me for Alderman again. I don't think any of 'em had reason to complain of me when I was in."

"Not much!" answered one of the group with great heartiness. "It was always a square divide."

"And what is my part in the campaign to be?" asked Mr. Bowser as he laid down the ticket.

"Speaking, sir," was the reply. "You can go about speaking and start the wave."

"And wave this crowd into office, I suppose?"

"That's it, and you'll find it a paying job, too. Here are the figures."

"The figures about what?"

"The profits, sir. There are six of us, and I figure that there will be at least \$20,000 to divide among us per year. You'll get your whack of that as straight as a string. Any campaign funds you advance are to be paid back out of the pot before it is divided. Is that plain?"

"I—I don't think so. We start in to reform?"

"We do."

"And we reform?"

"We do."

"And then—then what?"

"We divide the profits."

"But how do we make any profit?"

"Why, we crowd the other fellows out and get their places and their chances, don't we? A blind man can see that. Got your first speech ready?"

Mr. Bowser had about twenty words to say in reply. They were words that lifted each member of the committee out of his chair and opened his

eyes very wide. Then he headed the procession down the hall, and the cat brought up the rear. It was a solemn procession. There was a painful silence as each caller put on his hat. All were ready to get out when the ex-Alderman said:

"Old man, you've t'rown dis crowd down, but don't get giddy over it. We know how to get even."

"Good night, sir—and good night, sir!" stiffly replied Mr. Bowser as he bowed each one out and closed the door with a bang.

He was standing in front of the mantel when Mrs. Bowser came down stairs and quietly asked:

"I thought I heard a roaring, booming sound down here, and I came down to see if the wave of reform had been set in motion."

Mr. Bowser glared at her, but made no reply.

"Or won't the wave start until you get your whack of aldermanic stealings?" she continued.

Mr. Bowser gasped and choked, but he could not get out a word, and as Mrs. Bowser returned to her room the cat followed her and left him to wonder how the bottom had dropped out.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. BOWSER DOES A LITTLE REFORMING.

When Mr. Bowser arose the other morning, there was an uncertain look in his eyes—that is, Mrs. Bowser was not certain whether he was going up street to blow up the butcher or down street to blow up the tailor. He was moody and silent during breakfast, and as he made no move to leave the house after the meal, Mrs. Bowser kindly inquired if he wasn't feeling well.

"I'm feeling well enough," he replied, "but I shall remain at home this forenoon. There are several little things I want to look into and straighten out, and one of them is right at the door now."

"Do you mean the fruit peddler?"

"That's exactly what I mean. I am going to find out whether a man with an old horse and a wabbly wagon has any legal right to stop in front of my house and shout and yell and shriek and howl and bawl and roar like that. Just listen to him! By the living jingo, but it's no wonder that we've had five deaths on this street within the last two weeks!"

"But you—you won't go and say anything to him!"

"Won't I!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser as he clapped on his hat and opened the door and hustled down the steps, while the family cat and Mrs. Bowser looked after him.

"Strawberries! Cucumbers! Bananas!" yelled the peddler at the top of his voice and with a wave of his hand and a nod of his head toward every house on the block.

"Look here, you howling idiot," began Mr. Bowser as he walked up to him, "I want to know who gave you the legal right to murder folks with your voice?"

"D'ye mean my shoutin'?" asked the man in considerable astonishment.

"Of course I do! I want to know if the law gives you the right to whoop and yell and bellow and shriek and groan in order to call attention to the hog feed in your wagon. If it does, I'll see that it's changed. If it doesn't, I want you to quit."

"Say, old man," replied the peddler, with a leer, "you must have fell out of bed this morning. I've been selling wegetables for five years, and you are the first person I've met who wasn't charmed with my voice. Better tie a wet towel around your head and go to bed ag'in!"

"Don't give me any impudence!" shouted Mr.

Bowser. "You may be licensed to cart vegetables and fruits around, but are you licensed to set a thousand people's nerves on edge by your blasted howling?"

"I'm licensed to do anything I want to, old kicker," replied the man, "and if you want to raise a row about it come on. You look one of the sort who would take the bread out of a poor man's mouth, but if you try it on me I'll make you sorry!"

A crowd of children and pedestrians began to gather, and, realizing that he would have the worst of it, Mr. Bowser walked into the house. The peddler yelled "Cucumbers!" after him, and the children applauded, and Mrs. Bowser said:

"Don't you see you can't do anything with such men as that? They are coming along here from daylight till dark, and every one yells just like this man."

"But it's against the law, and I know it is!" shouted Mr. Bowser, as he struck the wall with his fist.

"Well, there's lots of things against the law, but you can't change 'em. If the police permit these peddlers to yell and scream, they won't stop their noise for anything you say."

"Then I'll break some one's neck!"

Mr. Bowser went out and sat down on the front steps. The fruit peddler grinned at him and moved on, but it was scarcely a minute before an



old clothes man turned the corner and set up his yell. He had yelled about sixteen times before he reached the Bowser's gate, and there he stopped and looked at the man on the steps and screamed out in agonized tones:

"Old clo'! Old clo'! Cash for old clo'!"

"Move on, you scoundrel!" shouted Mr. Bowser as he rose up.

"Old clo'! Old clo'! I buy old clo' for cash!"

"By the beard of Plato, but I'll have your life if you don't move on!" exclaimed Bowser as he clattered down the steps, with a tragedy in either eye.

The old clothes man ran across the street, but no farther, and from his new position he shrieked and shouted and yelled until he had collected a crowd of half a hundred people and Mr. Bowser had been forced into the house.

"You see you can't do anything," said Mrs. Bowser.

"But I will do something!" he hotly replied. "Are all the ordinances of this city made for the benefit of such howling demons as that? Has a taxpayer and property owner no rights? If there are no laws to protect me, then I'll protect myself."

Out he went again, and he was just in time to encounter a man who had turned in from Fourth street yelling:



**"YOU INFERNAL NUISANCE, SHUT UP, OR I'LL BREAK  
YOUR NECK."**



"Knives to grind-o! Knives to grind-o! Bring out your knives to grind-o!"

Mr. Bowser walked down to the gate. He looked like a dangerous man, but the knife grinder was willing to take chances if he could make a nickel. He halted his grinder on wheels and uttered his yell of "Grind-o!" as if Mr. Bowser was forty rods away. He was still hanging on to the "o" when he was seized and banged against the fence, and a voice rang in his ears:

"You infernal nuisance, shut up or I'll break your neck!"

The grinder shut up. He looked into Mr. Bowser's eyes and became afraid. However, as he was released after a minute and told to move on his courage returned, and he hadn't got more than ten feet away before he turned and said:

"You knocka me and banga me, and I taka de law on you!"

Mrs. Bowser opened the door and tried to argue the matter with Mr. Bowser, but he declared he'd wet his hands in the life-blood of the next nuisance who came along. He didn't have over ten minutes to wait. A junk dealer, an umbrella mender, a tinker and a popcorn man suddenly appeared in company, and all were yelling to drown the notes of the band on the corner. Mr. Bowser rose up like a buffalo bull about to make his last charge, and he was at the gate as they halted.

"Old junk! Umbrellas t' mend! Fix your pans! Fresh popcorn!" shouted the four at him as they waved their arms about.

Mrs. Bowser threw up the window to call out, but she was too late. Mr. Bowser had sailed in. He upset the junk cart and junk dealer, he overturned popcorn cart and popcorn dealer, he filled the air with old umbrellas and tinker tools, and it was Spion Kop over again, with Mr. Bowser in place of the Boers. He met the enemy, and they were his, and in five minutes he was in possession of the field of battle. He was cheered by the crowd which gathered, and a dozen over-enthusiastic taxpayers insisted on a speech. A man had arisen who had taken up the cudgel for reform, and they wanted to know his policy toward fire-crackers, baseball and kite-flying. Mr. Bowser backed up against the gate and might have given them an outline, but before he could collect his oratory a fat policeman burst through the crowd and seized him and said:

"You old ruffian! But you want to get up a riot and disturb half the town, do you? Come along with me!"

Mr. Bowser was walked to the police court and left in the "pen" till the judge was ready to hear his case and say:

"You may be a citizen and a taxpayer and a reformist, but you have no right to break loose and

take the law into your own hands. I fine you \$20, sir, and if you are brought here before me again on the same charge I shall feel it my duty to put you where you can do no more harm for the next six months!"

"Didn't I tell you how it would end?" asked Mrs. Bowser when he got home.

But he said no word in reply. He realized that if he even opened his mouth he would drop dead.

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Mrs. Bowser stood looking out of the window the other evening as Mr. Bowser came home from the office. There was a strange man with him, and they were in earnest conversation. He had a half guilty look on his face as he opened the door, and he seemed to want to be questioned, but the mystery was left unsolved until after dinner. Then she quietly asked:

"Well, what have you been buying this time?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then you've got some scheme on foot."

"There's no scheme about it. I have simply decided to do what any sensible man ought to do. When a man finds he is the victim of a dozen ailments, he ought to go at it and cure himself, oughtn't he?"

"Of course, but what are your ailments? Now and then you have a headache, or you get a corn on your toe, but your general health is excellent. It

was only the other day that you were boasting how rugged you were."

"My dear woman," he said as he walked about, "you know very well that I am no hand to complain. If I was dying, I should say nothing about it till the last moment. I may have boasted of my health, but is it a husband's place to alarm his wife? You now force me to tell you that I have a dozen different ailments at the present moment, any of which may prove fatal, but that I am going to make a heroic effort to live on. If you hadn't driven me into a corner, I should have kept my secret."

"I see," she quietly observed as the family cat came down stairs and cocked her eye at Mr. Bowser. "Is it a spring tonic or what?"

"I have been recommended to try horseback riding, and this evening I make my first experiment."

"And you imagine you will joggle the complaints away? I think I see you bouncing around in the saddle and the stirrups flying."

"Joggle! Bounce!" he shouted as he turned on her with a gesture which scared the cat out of the room. "You'd be sarcastic if I lay dead in the house! A nice wife you are to encourage a dying husband! Why should I joggle or bounce about in the saddle?"

"You shouldn't," she answered. "However, if you are going to take your first ride this evening



I hope you'll stick to the alley and that the horse is a gentle one. I haven't the slightest objection to your scheme. Indeed, I hope it will do you lots of good."

She spoke so kindly that Mr. Bowser recovered his good nature, and twenty minutes later he was with the boy holding a horse in the alley. It was a soft, moonlight evening, and the unpaved alley was clear of vehicles and just the place for a gallop.

"Is this a gentle horse?" asked Mr. Bowser as he was all ready to get into the saddle.

"He's like a lamb, sir," replied the boy. "Excuse me, but you are trying to get up on the wrong side. That's better. If I was you, I'd let him walk at first. Some folks are dizzy when they first move off."

Mr. Bowser had climbed into the saddle like a cow climbing over a fence, but as no one but the boy had seen him he didn't feel very bad about it. He had never been on the back of a horse three times in his life, and he was no sooner up than he wished he was down. The boy got his feet in the stirrups for him and encouraged him with quiet words, and after the horse had walked up and down for five minutes confidence was restored. Then the boy said:

"This hoss is one of the easiest lopers in the hull State, and if I was you I'd push him up a bit.

When he starts to lope, you'll think you are in a rocking cheer."

Mr. Bowser doubted it; but looking over the back fence, he made out Mrs. Bowser standing at one of the rear windows. She had referred to "bounce" and "joggle," and he felt that he was being tested. He drew a long breath, uttered a silent prayer and chirped for the horse to strike into a lope. The horse obeyed. Had the rider caught the motion it would have been plain sailing, but he didn't catch it. There were half a dozen bobs, three or four clutches at his mane, and Mr. Bowser rolled sideways out of the saddle and fell in a heap on a pile of ashes. It was a good boy and a sympathetic boy who had brought the horse around. He helped Mr. Bowser up, insisted that it was an accident that might have happened to the best rider on earth, and in various ways encouraged him to try again. The fallen rider kicked at the ash heap and struck at the fence and was for giving it up, but the boy soothed him and made him understand that he would lose prestige if he failed to mount again.

"I intend to, of course," replied Mr. Bowser in defiant tones as he noticed Mrs. Bowser still at the window. "I don't claim to be much of a rider, but I'll get the hang of it in a minute. I think the horse stubbed his toe the other time. Look

through that knot hole in the fence, will you, and tell me what you see in my back yard?"

"De kitchen girl is sittin' on de ground and laughin' herself to death," reported the lad after a look.

"She is, eh? Sent out by my wife to spy on me! Well, let her giggle. I'll stick on this time if I have to have my legs tied under the saddle."

"Dat's de way to talk. When you git into de saddle, jest move with de horse. All ready now."

Mr. Bowser had another climbing match, but in due time he found himself filling the saddle again. Prudence warned him to go slow, but when he thought of Mrs. Bowser and the cook he determined to run all risks. As he got a brace for his feet he struck the horse with his heel, and the animal started away on an easy canter. It was the rocking-chair motion the boy had referred to, but Mr. Bowser didn't catch it. He found himself bobbing about and his feet out of the stirrups, and before he knew what he was doing both heels struck the horse and set him off at full gallop. There was a yell that could have been heard half a mile away, and then the rider clutched the saddle, shut his eyes and bade good-by to things of earth—all except to Mrs. Bowser. The horse set off down the alley with his mind full of wonder, but the wonder soon changed to alarm as his burden lurched about, and before he had gone two blocks he made a shy

and a kick, and Mr. Bowser went rolling over the ground and brought up against a fence like a barrel of cider. It was a long time before the world returned to him. Then he opened his eyes to find Mrs. Bowser, the cook, a policeman, the boy and a workingman hovering over him.

"I think he's coming to," he heard the policeman say, "and you can set it down that his neck is not broken. What on earth possessed him to ride a horse, ma'am?"

"He wanted exercise," he heard Mrs. Bowser reply.

"Well, we'll lug him home for you, of course, but it won't do no good. He'll keep right on making a donkey of hisself till something drives him through a brick wall."

Mr. Bowser was lugged along the alley to his own back yard gate, his back gathering ashes at every step, and it was not until outsiders had retired that he sat up and said to Mrs. Bowser:

"Woman, I understand! I know who threw a club at the horse and jumped me out of the saddle! Hands off! I want no more of your help, and the cook is discharged on the spot. Follow me into the house. I want you to confess in writing to this attempted assassination, and then we will call in the lawyers and settle matters!"

For the first time in a year Mr. Bowser came home from his office the other day at noon-time, and Mrs. Bowser had only to glance at the look on his face and the bundle under his arm to realize that he had a new scheme on hand.

"Well, what is it?" she queried.

"Business being dull, I thought I'd take an afternoon off," he carelessly replied.

"But what are you going to do with these sticks and that paper?"

"I'm going to make a bit of an experiment."

"I thought it was time for you to break out again. You won't be satisfied until you have blown up the house and all of us with it. Is it dynamite this time?"

"My dear woman," slowly answered Mr. Bowser as he deposited his bundle on a chair, "let me reason with you a bit. Isn't it better for a man to be at home storing up scientific knowledge in his mind than to be loafing around the pool rooms and saloons? Hadn't you rather see my name in print as having made a useful discovery than to have it recorded that I was collared by a policeman for being drunk?"

"But what scientific knowledge are you seeking?" she asked. "As to discoveries, you've made about a hundred in the last two years, and almost every one of them has blown the windows out or knocked the back fence down."

"My dear woman," he softly continued, "here are a few harmless sticks and sheets of paper. I propose to take them up into the garret and make a kite. Did you ever hear of a kite blowing up anybody?"

"But what do you want with a kite? Do you propose to run up and down the streets with a gang of kids?"

"Woman, remember whom you are talking to! What I propose to do is to make some experiments in the interest of science. You have heard of humidity, I suppose?"

"Yes, and felt it, too."

"Very well. The humidity you have felt has all been in the lower strata of atmosphere, on what you might call the ground floor. When the humidity on the ground floor is 80 per cent, what is it at a height of 50 or 100 feet?"

"How can I tell, and why should I care?"

"Ah! there it is, you see. But for research and experiment the world wouldn't know that it was any colder at the North Pole than in Key West. You should care in the interests of science. If there's 80 per cent of humidity on the ground floor and only 40 per cent at a height of 100 feet, the world of science should be informed of the fact."

"But what good would it do if we knew it?" persisted Mrs. Bowser.

"Woman, I pity you!" said Mr. Bowser as he

turned away. "If all people were as indifferent as you we should never have known about the revolutions of the earth. I did hope for some enthusiasm and encouragement from you, but it was a foolish hope. I shall go ahead, however. The cook will make me some paste and I will build a kite."

"And what's the kite for?"

"To send up into the atmosphere, of course. Attached to it will be this instrument for recording the humidity. Also a thermometer for recording the temperature. However, as you take no interest in these things it is useless to waste further time explaining. Retain your ignorance, Mrs. Bowser—retain and hug your ignorance to your soul, while I will go ahead and make a discovery for the benefit of the whole world."

She had nothing more to say, and he got his paste and made his way to the garret. Nothing more was seen of him till dinner time, and then he brought down a finished kite.

"So you have put off your experiments till to-morrow?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

"Not at all," he replied. "I forgot to tell you that my first experiment is to be made after dark. What I want to get is the humidity and temperature of the evening. There is going to be a good breeze to-night, and I shall count on favorable results."

"You'll get the whole neighborhood out, and there are boys around here who'd like no better



fun than to plunk you with missiles. Give up your idea and let's go to the theater."

"Never, Mrs. Bowser—never in this world! I have set out to make a discovery. I shall make it. The neighborhood will not be out, and no boys will plunk me. All will be done very quietly and smoothly, and I shall not have to go out of our own yard."

Mr. Bowser waited until darkness fell and then took his kite into the back yard. He thought he had deceived everybody, but not five minutes had gone before half a dozen boys had passed the word and were getting ready to enjoy the fun with him. There was a good breeze, and it was no trick at all for him to get that kite up forty feet. He held it there for five minutes, and then hauled it down and excitedly announced to Mrs. Bowser, who was standing in the back door:

"I've struck it right off! What do you suppose the humidity up there is?"

"I can't guess."

"It's 480 per cent! It's recorded right here, and there can be no mistake."

"It can't be. There wouldn't be half of that humidity in the densest fog."

"But here it is—480 per cent," he persisted, "and you can't get around it. Mrs. Bowser, I have made a discovery which will set the whole world talking. While I am sure there can be no mistake, I'll send



HE JUST FELL OFF THE ROOF.



the kite up again to verify my figures. To keep it clear of those telephone wires I'll climb on the roof of the shed."

With laborious effort he clambered up and the kite was passed up to him. It had just got a start when the boys hidden along the back fence began business. The potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, stones and lumps of coal were about evenly divided between Mr. Bowser and the kite. Both fell at the same time, but Mr. Bowser fell the hardest. Something hit him on the nose as he was paying out string and he sat down on the roof. Then something else hit him in the ear, and in his excitement he rolled off, struck on the clothes line, and was bounced off into a grove of sunflowers which Mrs. Bowser had been jealously guarding all summer. The cook came out and assisted her to pull him out feet first and straighten his legs and get the leaves and dirt out of his hair. They were bending over him as consciousness returned and he sat up.

"Well, what about the humidity?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

He rose up with painful effort. The busted kite lay there on the grass, and the heads of seven different boys could be seen above the back fence. Without a look around, however, Mr. Bowser entered the kitchen and climbed the stairs. Mrs. Bowser followed. When they had entered the sit-

ting room he turned on her and hoarsely whispered:

"Woman, I see—I understand!"

"You understand that the humidity was 480 per cent?" she replied.

He extended his right arm and waved it. Then he followed suit with the left. Then he kicked out both legs and rolled up his eyes and worked his ears. She waited patiently, but he couldn't get out another word, and after a minute he turned away and climbed heavily up stairs and banged his bedroom door after him. Two hours later, when she went up, he was in bed and asleep, and he hadn't even wiped the tomato seeds off his chin.

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Mr. Bowser had finished his after-dinner cigar and his evening paper, when Mrs. Bowser glanced at him to find a look on his face which plainly signified that he had something on his mind. She maintained silence, however, and it was five minutes later that he said:

"I was telling Brown, over at the office, about my rheumatism, and do you know what he advised?"

"But when have you had rheumatism?" she asked.

"When? When? Well, that's pretty cool, when you know that I've had to hobble about like a lame hen for a year past! Both of my legs seem to be

tied up in knots to-night, and I can hardly raise my arm to my collar. Nothing but my will-power has kept me on my feet for the last six months."

"It's curious that you never mentioned it to me."

"Nothing curious about it. I've simply dosed and rubbed and tried to get rid of it without any fuss. If a woman has a cold in her head she'll let everybody for a mile around know all about it, but a man may have a thousand pains and keep the torture all to himself. I'm no hand to complain. If I sat here dying I shouldn't say anything to you about it."

"Well, what did Brown advise?" asked Mrs. Bowser, knowing that some new fad had been put forward.

"The same remedy that cured him. He had rheumatism for twenty-seven years, and paid out \$11,000 without finding relief, and was then cured in ten days."

"Wonderful!" gasped Mrs. Bowser. "I suppose it will be in the papers—a full-page testimonial?"

"And I suppose it won't!" snapped Mr. Bowser. "Brown didn't cure himself with a patent medicine, and he's no hand to blow around. In fact, if we hadn't been close friends I'd never have known of his cure. All he did was to go out into his own back yard in his barefeet of a dewy night. It's what they call the barefoot cure."

"And you are going to try it?"

"I am. I'm going to try it right off, now. Ten nights will work a perfect cure. All I've got to do is to parade around on the dewy grass for fifteen minutes at a time."

"And you really believe such nonsense!" she exclaimed, as he began removing his shoes and stockings. "If anybody had told me that a man forty-eight years old would——"

"There you go!" he interrupted, as he got one foot bared. "Did I ever make a move to regain my health that you didn't oppose me? Here is a thing that has been tried by thousands, and effected a cure in every case, and yet you call it nonsense! I knew you'd ridicule it as a matter of course, but that will not change my purpose."

Mrs. Bowser had nothing more to say, and Mr. Bowser removed the other shoe and stocking, rolled up the bottoms of his trousers and was ready to go out. He hesitated for a minute to give her a chance to make further remarks, but as none came he descended to the kitchen and passed out of the back door. He was out for the dew, and he proceeded to look for it. Folding his arms and keeping his head well up he began promenading back and forth the length of the yard, and it wasn't five minutes before he imagined that he was already feeling better. Mrs. Bowser came and looked



out of the window at him, and as he caught her smile he growled:

"Oh! yes. She calls it another of my fads, and is giggling away to herself, but let her giggle. Ten nights of it and I'll be able to jump a five-rail fence."

He turned to march back, and as he did so he gave his right foot a scrape to scoop in an extra amount of dew. The scrape was only half-completed when the watching Mrs. Bowser saw him jump a foot high and come down in a heap, and he was using swear-words by the dozen when she lifted the sash and asked what was the matter. He had picked up a large and aggressive carpet-tack, but as he heard her voice he yanked it out and exclaimed:

"There's nothing the matter with me, and you put down that window and go away! Mighty curious that I can't make a move without your trying to set all the neighbors on to me!"

Mrs. Bowser retired, and after nursing his foot for awhile, Mr. Bowser arose and limped his way over the grass. There wasn't as much dew as he expected to find, and by and by he sought the higher grass. How many carpet-tacks, pieces of glass and iron hoops and clothes pins he just missed during the next five minutes he will never know, but something was lying in wait which he couldn't miss. It was a great lot of loose barbed

wire, which he had intended to fasten on top the fence to discourage the cats, and in his promenade he suddenly encountered it. Something else also occurred at almost the same instant. A neighbor's boy, who had been watching the barefoot cure from a second-story window, decided that Mr. Bowser was too good a target to be missed, and he let fly a potato which hit the patient in the back of the head just as the wire tackled his feet. Mrs. Bowser heard a yell which jumped her heart into her mouth, and as she flew to the window Mr. Bowser was rolling over the ground and trying to kick his legs loose from the wire. He uttered a fresh yell every second, and each succeeding one was louder and rounded off with more vigor. While Mrs. Bowser was running down stairs to see what it was all about he got rid of the wire and sprang up and started for the back door on a keen gallop. In his excitement he forgot the clothes-line, which he had been compelled to bend to on every turn, and it struck him across the breast and lifted him off his feet and flung him head-over-heels half-way to the back fence. There, with his head in the grass and his legs doubled under, Mrs. Bowser and the cook found him, and it was half an hour later when he opened his eyes and found himself lying on his back on the sitting room floor, and the two women rubbing his head and chafing his hands and holding various sorts of liquids under his nose.



" A BOY IN THE NEXT YARD LET FLY A POTATO.



"Woman!" he exclaimed, as he made out the situation—"woman, this dastardly attempt on my life—this—this——"

"Are you conscious?" interrupted Mrs. Bowser.

"Of course I'm conscious, and I want to tell you that your murderous intentions——"

"Then you'd better try and crawl up stairs, Mr. Bowser, and I'll send for the doctor. You've got about 400 digs and scratches on your feet and legs, and a lump as big as a goose egg on the back of your head, and it seems to me that you've been telescoped together and made two feet shorter. Just keep quiet now. I think your rheumatism is permanently cured, but if you get excited your life may pay the forfeit. That's the way—crawl along on your hands and knees, and we won't say anything to the doctor about the barefoot cure. We'll just tell him that you fell off the roof and struck a nest of bumble-bees and feel in need of a spring tonic!"

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For a few minutes after dinner the other evening there was something of a mystery around the Bowser mansion. Mr. Bowser insisted on answering a ring at the basement bell, and there was a whispered conversation, and a large package was taken in. Then he asked Mrs. Bowser if she wouldn't run up stairs and busy herself for a quarter of an hour. She complied without asking any

questions, and by and by was told that she might come down. She found Mr. Bowser beaming with good nature. He was even holding the cat on his lap.

"And now about all this mystery?" queried Mrs. Bowser.

"Sit down, dear, and let us have a little talk. I'm an old kicker of a husband, ain't I?"

"Why, I suppose you are like all other husbands."

"I'm a heap worse, and I'm ashamed of it. I've been thinking things over for the last week, and I'm wondering how you have stood it with me as well as you have. If I'd married any other woman, there'd have been a divorce long ago."

Mrs. Bowser fully realized that Mr. Bowser in too good nature was just as dangerous as Mr. Bowser in kicking mood, and she simply replied that she had no fault to find and called his attention to a new book she had bought that day. He was not to be switched off however.

"Do you remember our first meeting?" he asked, as he melted a little more. "I was at your house to see your father, and you entered the room. I fell in love with you at first sight. I thought you the cutest, sweetest, coziest little woman in all this world, and in five minutes I had made up my mind to win your heart and your hand. Years have

St. Paul stored? - Acta.





passed since then, but I still think of you as I did that day."

"That—that is good of you," replied Mrs. Bowser, as her face flushed with pleasure and she forgot the peril of the situation.

"It was a case of love, and I hope it will go on to the end. There are times when I lose my temper and talk about divorce and all that nonsense, but you shouldn't lay it up against me."

"I never do."

"No, you go right along being the best little woman heaven ever let live, and that makes me ashamed of myself ten times over. I'm a mean old curmudgeon; I'm a contemptible old kicker; I'm a nagger from 'way back, and if you weren't an angel, you'd have divorced me long ago. Can you forgive me for the way I have acted in the past?"

Mr. Bowser's chin quivered, his voice broke and tears started in his eyes. The cat made up her mind that torpedoes were being planted for a grand blow-up, and she got down off his knee and sought shelter under the piano. Mrs. Bowser said there was nothing to forgive, and, wiping the tears from her own eyes, she began talking about the new cook who had arrived that day. She had got as far as to say that the girl appeared to know her duties when Mr. Bowser interrupted with:

"If I ever do any more kicking around this house, I hope you'll call in the neighbors to boot

me around the block. It isn't the right thing to do. A wife has just the same legal rights as a husband. He has no legal or moral right to set himself up as a big Injun and run things. It would have served me right if you had turned on me some time with the ax. I never read of a wife killing her husband without wondering if he wasn't just such a mean man as I am. So you can forgive me and give me another show?"

Mrs. Bowser assured him that she could, and asked him for the latest news from Manila. He didn't seem to hear the question, but got up and passed into the parlor and lighted all the gas-jets. When he returned, he was bubbling over, and it was a minute or two before he could say:

"Well, angel of earth, your old kicker has got a little surprise for you. It will show you that I'm not so bad after all. I may raise rows and say mean things, but I appreciate you at your full worth, just the same."

"And you've got a surprise for me?" she asked.

"I have, and it's a corker. Come right in and behold it."

On the wall in the parlor where he had taken another picture down to make room for it hung a portrait of Mrs. Bowser in a gilt frame. It was a portrait done in crayon. It was after a photograph twelve years old. It had been done by the office boy in Mr. Bowser's office. He was an office

boy without a lazy hair in his head. When he wasn't going to the postoffice or sweeping out he was making portraits or hunting around second-hand stores to find frames which could be cut down to fit them. His industry had given Mr. Bowser an idea, and Mrs. Bowser's crayon was the result. It had all come in for \$3 per week except the frame.

"Why—why, who is it?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she stood before the picture. Being from her oldest photograph and the style being so ancient, she could not recognize herself.

"Who is it?" echoed Mr. Bowser, as he slipped his arm around her and gave her a kiss. "Well, it's the picture of the best little wife on top of this earth, and she's standing right beside me at this moment. What have you got to say about it?"

"It—it was awfully kind of you."

"Don't mention it. I wish I could have presented you with forty of 'em. It's you to a dot. I think it's the best piece of work I ever saw. That boy will make his mark if he keeps on. Now, then, I'm going to ask Davis and his wife to run in and look at it."

"I don't think I would—not to-night."

"And why? Davis claims to know all about art, and I want his criticism. He'll try to find some flaw, but he'll have mighty hard work. Mrs. Davis will probably want one done by the same boy."

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"I don't think they are home this evening," said Mrs. Bowser as she tried to hide her feelings and took a closer look at the picture.

The crayon was the work of black and white and industry. The office boy wasn't up on backgrounds. He considered backgrounds and foregrounds a useless waste of material. He had never taken particular notice of how the head and arms of his fellow beings were nailed on, and in working from a photograph he had corrected several mistakes of the photographer. He had enlarged the mouth, been generous with the ears and given the chin a slant on an entirely new line. He had also improved the eyes to match the mouth—that is, one of them was cocked up in surprise and the other drawn down in a squint. Mrs. Bowser's heart stood still as she noted all these things and a dozen more. That crayon was a token of love, and how could she find fault with it? She couldn't. She gave Mr. Bowser a kiss and ran up stairs as if to hide her coyness. He was calling it coyness and chuckling and rubbing his hands when Davis walked in.

"What on earth is that?" he queried as he looked at the crayon.

"And you don't recognize it!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser.

"Hanged if I do, or you either! It may be your cook, your grandmother, or the woman who sells

horseradish on this street. Ye gods! Bowser, take it down!"

"What's wrong with it?"

"It would scare a horse if you hung it up in the stable! Why, I could hold a stick of crayon between my toes and do better work! For heaven's sake, but don't let your wife see it!"

"But she has seen it."

"Then go and apologize; buy her off; lie out of it. Poor woman! I can understand how she is suffering. Fix it up, Bowser—for mercy's sake, fix it up with her! Good-night! I was going to ask you to step around to the club, but you want to get rid of that."

Mrs. Bowser was listening on the stairs. The cat came creeping in as Mr. Bowser stood there and wondered where the shrapnel shell would burst. The clock ticked five minutes away into eternity, and then Mr. Bowser moved. He moved with a jump. He rushed forward and grabbed that crayon and pulled on it until he broke the wire. Then he raised it on high and brought it down with a smash and jumped on it again and again. The cat flew out of the room, and Mrs. Bowser uttered words of thankfulness. By and by Mr. Bowser came up to go to bed. He was silent and stern.

"Did—did anything fall down stairs?" asked Mrs. Bowser after awhile.

"Yes; something fell!" he sternly replied. "And

it will probably be better, while our lawyers are consulting about the divorce, for you to go home to your mother. I believe the train leaves at noon!"



## CHAPTER XII.

### BOWSER TURNS PHRENOLOGIST.

Nothing but a faint smile around the corners of his mouth and a gurgling at intervals in his throat indicated to Mrs. Bowser during the dinner hour that Mr. Bowser had a surprise party in store for her. It was useless for her to guess what it was, and she therefore waited in patience till they had returned to the sitting room. Then Mr. Bowser produced a little book and looked it over for ten minutes before he said:

"You have heard of phrenology, of course? If I am not mistaken, old Professor Fowler once examined your head."

"Is that book about phrenology?" she quietly asked.

"It is. I am going to post myself a bit. To-day I felt the heads of three different men in the office and told the character of each and every one."

"I thought it was about time. I believe it's about a week since you dropped the last new thing."

"I expected you'd say something mean," replied Mr. Bowser, but without his usual heat and with-

out violence to the family cat rubbing against his leg. "If I'd have brought home a pocket Bible or the gospel hymns it would have been just the same. Phrenology is a recognized science. It is an interesting study. Why not study it with me?"

"Because I don't believe in it. You might as well feel of the corns and bunions on a person's foot as the bumps on his head."

"You'd say that, of course, but I can soon convince you to the contrary. I'll feel of your bumps, and with the aid of this little book I'll read your character as straight as a string. Just sit right where you are, and——"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she interrupted. "It's all nonsense, and you'd better put in your time reading history."

"Then take the book and feel of my head. All the bumps are named."

"And if what I find doesn't happen to suit you there'll be a row. Let us have a game of cards and pass a pleasant evening."

"Now, then, don't be silly," coaxingly remarked Mr. Bowser. "Let's see what there is to this thing. I pledge you my word not to get miffed even if you find me a murderer. Take the book and give it a trial."

Mrs. Bowser allowed herself to be persuaded. Selecting a chart of a man's head, she passed her fingers over Mr. Bowser's skull and presently said:

"According to phrenology, your bump of impetuosity is abnormally developed. You are also very conceited. You have no fixed purpose, but just jump from one thing to another. You are quick tempered and very obstinate. If you had more strength of character, you might make a mark in the world, but as it is——"

"But as it is, madam, I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Bowser, as he rose up and reached for the book. "I might have known, of course, that you would slander me."

"I gave it exactly as it is in the book."

"Well, let it go. If it was your intention to turn me from my purpose, you have failed. I shall continue to study the art. Perhaps the cook won't object to becoming a subject."

Mrs. Bowser smiled as he started for the kitchen, but raised no objections. The cook was just finishing her dinner dishes as Mr. Bowser invaded her domains.

"You have heard of phrenology?" he queried, as he pointed to the book in his hand.

"Has the mistress any complaint to make of the cooking?" she asked in reply.

"Not that I know of. I was asking you if you knew about phrenology. It relates to the bumps of your head, you know."

"And what of the bumps on me head? Did the

mistress ask about me bumps when she hired me? If she objects to them, let her give me notice."

"My good girl, you don't understand. All of us have bumps on our heads. By feeling of the bumps one can tell a person's disposition. For instance, one bump shows a sweet temper; another shows self-conceit; another shows obstinacy, and so on."

"But isn't me cookin' all right?" demanded the woman.

"I said it was."

"Then who's to care about the bumps on me head, or me disposition?"

"You don't understand yet," continued Mr. Bowser. By feeling of the bumps on your head I can tell you——"

"You'll never feel of me bumps while I'm alive!" interrupted the cook, "and if you ain't out of this kitchen in two jiffs, I'll walk off and leave you without a cook!"

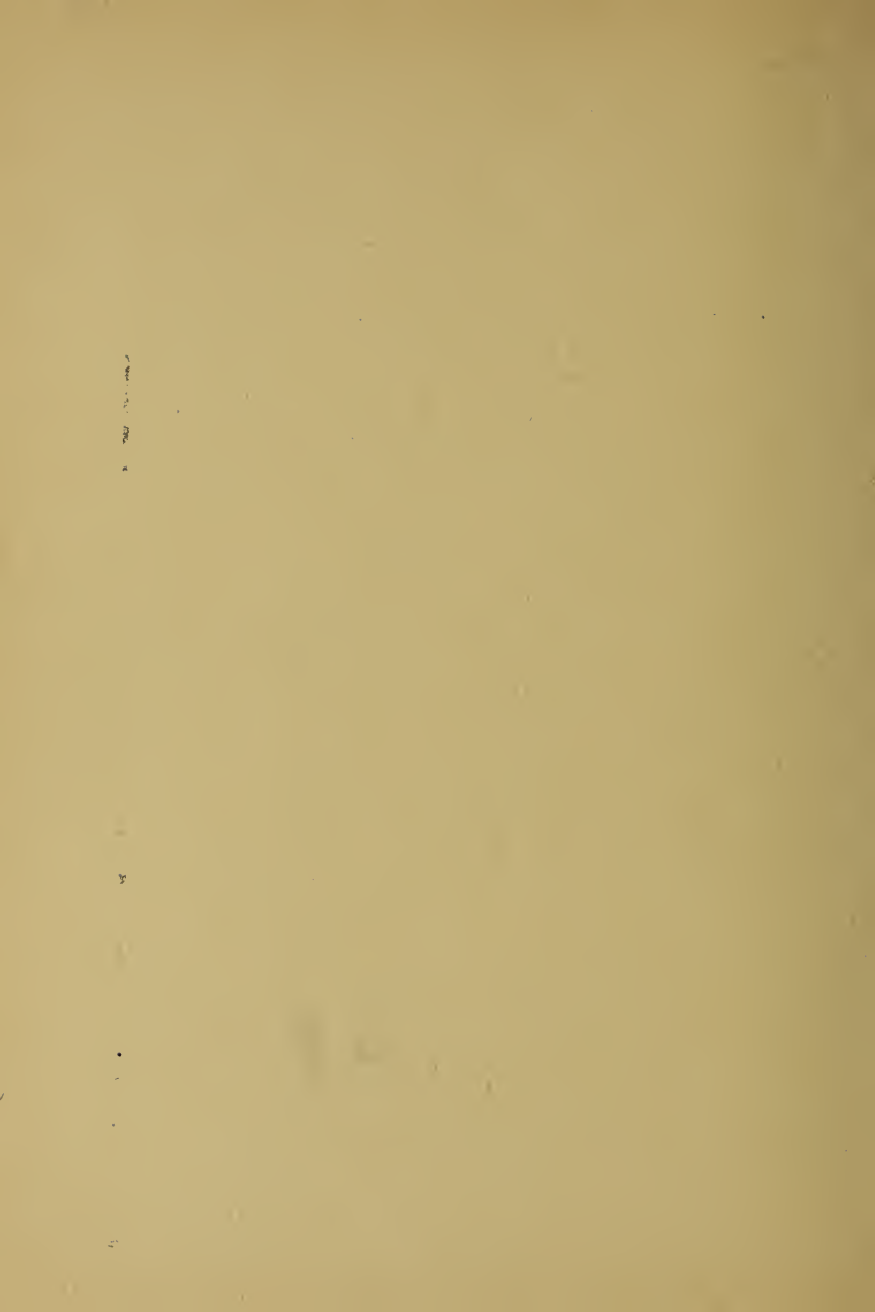
Mr. Bowser retired. It was a question whether he retired in good order or not. He realized that Mrs. Bowser had stood at the head of the stairs and overheard all, and that he had made a muss of it. She had a smile on her face as he entered the sitting room, and that smile brought a determination to his heart to conquer or die.

"You—you probably advise me to give it up, don't you?" he asked.

"You might practice outside," she suggested.



"BUT ISN'T ME COOKING ALL RIGHT?"



"And so I will!" he retorted as the red came to his face. "I have set out to post myself on phrenology, and by the beard of my grandfather, I'll do it or die!"

He walked out into the hall, clapped on his hat and opened the door and stepped out. There was a man hanging over a near-by gate. He wasn't a tramp, but a workingman who was sweet on a girl working next door, and was waiting for her to appear. Mr. Bowser called to him, and he came in off the street and asked what was wanted.

"Would you like to earn a couple of dollars in about fifteen minutes?" was asked.

"You bet."

"Have you ever heard of phrenology?"

"If I have, I've forgotten. Is the gas leaking or a water-pipe busted?"

"Phrenology has to do with the bumps on your head. I feel of your bumps and read your character by them. I believe in it, but my wife don't. I want you to come and sit down for a few minutes while I show her that I'm right."

The man was willing. He followed Mr. Bowser in and was referred to as a "subject." Mrs. Bowser kept her chair and became interested.

"Now, then," began Mr. Bowser, after two minutes spent in locating various bumps, "I find your bump of musical talent above the average. I should



say that you can play on several different instruments and have a fairly good voice."

"Lord save you, sir!" gasped the man, "but I never could even raise a tune on a mouth organ, and as for singing, everybody runs away when I try it!"

"I think you are inclined to be very religious. Are you a Sunday-school teacher?"

"Great Scots, no! Religious? Why, I don't even believe in a hereafter! I'm the man who ate up a chapter of the Bible on a bet!"

"But you reverence truth," persisted Mr. Bowser, as his face began to pale.

"Mebbe I do, sir, but they calls me 'The Red Hook Liar' all the same."

"Are you not tender-hearted—that is, don't you love children?"

"Well, I'm expecting to be arrested to-morrow for lambasting a kid this afternoon. Your henology, or whatever you call it, don't seem to work. I guess your wife is right."

"It never works unless there are brains under the bumps," stiffly replied Mr. Bowser as he handed the man his \$2 and accompanied him to the door.

When he returned he stood before Mrs. Bowser and glared at her for a moment, and then said:

"Woman, this thing has gone to the limit. The

conspiracy is plain. In your malicious desire to—to——”

Then Mrs. Bowser began to laugh. He gestured, but it did not stop her. He towered over her, but she continued to laugh. He shouted something about his lawyer and her lawyer and divorce, but she hung to her chair and laughed. There was but one way to save his dignity. Like a crowbar on legs he marched down the hall, and like a crowbar with stiff knees he mounted the stairs, and two hours later she went to find him asleep and his bump of conceit all flattened out.

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“I was just thinking,” said Mr. Bowser as he laid aside his paper the other evening, “how foolish it is for men to strive for money beyond a certain point.”

“Yes,” quietly replied Mrs. Bowser as she looked up and wondered what was coming.

“Take our case, for instance. While we are not rich we take solid comfort. We have all the necessities and many of the luxuries. If we were worth \$10,000,000, you could not be a more loving or devoted wife.”

“Do you really think so?” she asked, and a smile of pleasure rested on her face.

“Think so! You bet I do! You are the best and the dearest little woman in all this world, and I am a cantankerous old crank and kicker.”

"You are a good man, Mr. Bowser."

"No, I ain't! I'm obstinate, selfish and cranky, and I sometimes wonder why you don't run away and leave me. I wish I were a better man."

"You are good enough for me," said Mrs. Bowser as she went over and patted his bald head and kissed his left ear.

"But I'm always blaming you, while you are never to blame. Don't you remember my buying that horse?"

"Yes, dear."

"You warned me that I'd regret it, but I would buy him, and I lost a clean \$100 and came near breaking my neck. Then I got the crazy idea of keeping a cow, and I was \$25 out on that deal. Then I bought a pig; then I got the chicken fever; then I had the back yard plowed up for a garden; then I invested in a fire escape; then——"

"Never mind, dear," she interrupted as she fondled his chin.

"But I can't help but mind," he persisted. "Think of the idea of my investing \$10 in that microbe destroyer when there wasn't a blamed microbe within 100 miles of our house! And then I paid \$15 for a family medicine chest and nearly poisoned the whole of us with the first dose! Mrs. Bowser, if I had listened to you—if all husbands had the sense to listen to their wives—I'd have been a heap better off."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it and am free to confess it."

"Then, dear, I want to tell you something."

"Crack ahead, it will be hard, common sense, whatever it is."

"Won't you please get over those idle fancies in regard to your health? In the last two weeks you have bought a lung pad, a liver pad, six bottles of stomach bitters and a lot of lozengers and troches. It is only money thrown away. Nothing ails you. You are simply led away by a whim, and I hope——"

"Whim? Led away?" repeated Mr. Bowser. "Mrs. Bowser, do you mean to intimate that I don't know what I want?"

"No, no, dear, but you see you imagine that this or that ails you, and you——"

"I imagine these things, do I? I imagine them and then rush off like a fool and buy a cure! Did I buy that lung pad to check consumption in its insipient stage, that I might be spared to my family, or simply to throw away six good dollars? Idle fancies! Led away!"

"Well, let's drop the whole subject," said Mrs. Bowser, as she felt the ground shaking. "If anything ails your liver, you want a remedy, of course."

"If anything ails my liver! If my liver was all right, would I be ass enough to buy a liver pad?"

Perhaps my head is stuffed with sawdust! It's a wonder that a certain person hasn't applied to the courts to have me sent to an idiot asylum!"

"But you were saying that I had such good judgment, and that if you had listened to me you'd——"

"Never said a thing of the sort! That's the way with you and all other wives. A husband admits that he might possibly have done better in one single instance, and then they jump in and try to make out that he doesn't know enough to pound sand. Who runs my lungs, my liver and my stomach? Who is the best judge of what ails 'em? Nothing ails me, eh? I am simply led away by idle fancies, the same as a born idiot!"

"You know I didn't mean it that way, dear."

"Mrs. Bowser, I had a whim that we might put in a couple of weeks at the seashore next summer. We don't put! I imagined that you would want about \$300 to fix up your wardrobe, but we don't fix! When a man's own wife looks upon him as a driveling idiot, it is time he struck another job."

"Mr. Bowser, when you called yourself a cantankerous old crank and kicker — when you admitted that you had made a dozen bad mistakes—when you——"

"I a crank and kicker!" he shouted, as his ears twitched and his neck reddened. "I admit that I have made a dozen bad mistakes! Mrs. Bowser, it

is two hundred miles to your mother's home! There are four trains per day! It is yet early in the evening, and you will have time to pack your trunks to catch the first train in the morning. Your lawyer can open a correspondence with mine as soon as you see fit. I have been seized with a whim to go to bed! Good night, Mrs. Bowser—good night!”

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Mr. Bowser had smoked only half his after dinner cigar when he began to hitch around in a way to prove to Mrs. Bowser that he had something on his mind. She waited for him to begin, and presently he said:

“Mrs. Bowser, I want to say a few words to you this evening in good nature, and it will be entirely your fault if there is any hard feeling.”

“Well, what is it?” she asked.

“I don't like a mannish woman, as you very well know, and all this talk about woman's rights makes me very tired. I believe, however, that a woman should pay attention to some few things beyond bargain sales and tea parties.”

“You are very kind,” she answered. “I would like to know what is going on in the political world. What are the issues at stake this year?”

“The issues, Mrs. Bowser,” he replied as he walked around—“the issues are tremendous. There is our foreign policy, for one thing.”

"Just what is that?"

"What is it? What is it? Why, it's our foreign policy, of course. You know what foreign means, I suppose? We have a policy toward all foreign countries, and it's a mighty good thing we have."

"But what is the policy?"

Mr. Bowser was stumped. He flushed up and looked around uneasily, and when the family cat came down stairs and wanted to rub against his leg he lifted his foot so menacingly that she jumped six feet.

"It refers, of course, to our general and particular attitude on general and particular questions," said Mrs. Bowser in answer to her own question.

"There is the Philippine question, for instance."

"What—what do you know about the Philippine question?" he asked.

"Not much. There are those who claim that under the Monroe Doctrine we have no right to hold them, but the majority is with the President in his policy to retain possession. You understand it that way, I presume?"

He didn't reply. He simply glared at her and kicked himself for having opened the subject.

"And we have a Chinese policy," she went on. "We have treaty rights there, and we are bound to make Russia, France, Germany and England respect them in their grabbing of territory. Yes, Mr. Bowser, I think I have a dim perception as to what



a foreign policy means, but I'd be glad to have you enlighten me all you can."

He stood with hands crossed under his coattails and glared at her, and the cat walked around on tiptoe and scented a family row in the distance.

"What are the other prominent issues, Mr. Bowser," queried Mrs. Bowser without appearing to notice his attitude.

"You have heard of the currency question, perhaps?" he half sneered.

"I—I think I have, but I'd like to be fully posted. Isn't our currency all right?"

"You see, it's the silver question that makes all the trouble, but I don't think we need do any worrying. We will pass-on to something else."

"But I have heard so much about the currency that I'd like to know more," she persisted.

"I said we would pass on!" he growled, knowing that he wasn't posted and would meet with a fall.

"In a minute, Mr. Bowser. As I understand it, in our monetary system we have so much silver to so much gold. A portion of the people want to raise the ratio of silver, or, indeed, to coin it almost without limit. Those are called free silver men."

Mr. Bowser returned to his glare, and the cat winked an eye as she saw his neck growing red.

"The majority of the people, however, want the ratio to remain the same, and to maintain the gold

standard. It seems to me, though I am only a woman, that our standard ought to be the same as that of the strong commercial powers of Europe. The standard of a country's currency is her credit, isn't it?"

"Look here, woman, what are you trying to get at?" almost shouted Mr. Bowser, as he decided to try bluff. "I set out to post you on the issues of the campaign, so that you may at least listen understandingly, and what do you do? Do you listen and get posted, or do you interrupt me with nonsense?"

"Well, then, go on with some more issues. I presume the question of the Nicaragua Canal has some little bearing, hasn't it? I see there is a division about it."

"It has some bearing," he grudgingly admitted, "but we will not discuss it this evening. It's an intricate question of politics."

"But I don't see the intricacy," she said. "We want a canal to connect the Caribbean Sea, with the Pacific and save us the long voyage around Cape Horn. We want it to be an American canal and to control it ourselves. England, for one, would like it to be an international affair. If the canal is put through, it will be a Government undertaking. Isn't that the way you understand it?"

"Never!" he shouted, as he jumped at the cat.

"Then how is it?"

"I refuse to say! If you think you know it all—and you evidently do—go ahead and have it your own way! What a fool a husband is to ever talk to his wife about anything beyond gum and novels!"

"Why, I don't see anything to get mad at," she replied. "I just asked if you understood the canal question the way I did. We will drop it, of course, but I want to ask you about the issues put forward by Mr. Bryan in this campaign."

"He's for America, of course," replied Mr. Bowser, being unable to think of any other issues.

"Naturally enough, as he is an American and asking for American votes, but what is his platform—what does he pledge his party to?"

Mr. Bowser couldn't say. He hadn't read a line of politics in six months. As she waited for him to reply he decided that he must raise a row to save his prestige, and he suddenly called out:

"Woman, I have been insulted in my own house and by my own wife, and I don't propose to stand it! Instead of going to the club this evening and enjoying myself I stayed home to give you a few pointers to hide your ignorance, and this is my reward—this—this—this!"

And he kicked over a chair, scared the cat half to death and sat down on the lounge and bobbed up and down.

"Will you tell me what I've done?" quietly asked Mrs. Bowser.

"You—you've tried to make out that you—you——"

"That I know more than you do about the political situation?"

"That's it—that's your old trick! While you don't actually know whether William McKinley or Jim Jones is President, you go on as glib as if you'd read every line of politics for the last twenty years! Mrs. Bowser—woman—you mark what I tell you when I say——"

But he didn't finish. The doorbell rang, and, delighted at the interruption, he hastened down the hall to open it.

"Does Mr. Bowser live here?" queried a man who stood on the steps.

"He does, but you can't gum-game him for a cent! No cold victuals—no old clothes—no cast. You'd better hump right out of this!"

The stranger humped, and Mr. Bowser returned to the sitting room and sat down to read and smoke. It was a long fifteen minutes before Mrs. Bowser asked:

"Do you know who that man was?"

"Tramp, of course," he growled.

"But it wasn't. It was our minister!"

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When Mr. Bowser reached home the other evening there was an air of importance about him that puzzled Mrs. Bowser. His hat was cocked over on

one ear, he swaggered and he had the general air of a man who carries his wad in his vest pocket. He was ready to answer all questions and wondered why she didn't begin, but she held her peace. Whatever had happened, he couldn't keep it long to himself. He grew more self-important as dinner progressed, but it was not until their return to the sitting room that he lighted a cigar, thrust his thumbs into his vest holes, and, with great condescension, inquired:

"Mrs. Bowser, I am ready to be congratulated."

"Upon what?" she asked.

"Upon being Alderman of the Fourteenth Ward."

"When did that happen? I hadn't heard of any city election being held."

"No election has been held, but you are looking at an Alderman, just the same. A surprise, isn't it? I thought it would be. How will it sound to hear yourself addressed as 'Mrs. Alderman Bowser?' "

"So you've got into politics?" she queried, as she watched him walk up and down with what he thought was a Roman empire gait.

"I have. I couldn't help it. You know that I have fought for the last twenty years to keep out of politics, but I have had to succumb at last. Yes, Mrs. Bowser, I may be mentioned as having entered the arena of public life."

"It is very sudden, isn't it?"

"Well, perhaps, though I have been expecting it for some time. I have seen that our party in this ward lacked cohesion and a leader. I have realized that there was but one man who could lead it to victory."

"And you are the man?"

"I am the man, Mrs. Bowser," he replied, as he drew himself up, swelled out his chin, and looked to weigh a ton. The family cat came out from under the piano and rubbed against his leg and arched her back and tried to look as big as a barrel.

"Well, you'll make a donkey of yourself," said Mrs. Bowser, as she turned away.

"I expected you would say so, of course, and it will not alter my determination. It is Alderman this year—Mayor next—Governor next. I may not stop there. You may some day tread the floors of the White House."

Mrs. Bowser sighed wearily, while the cat uttered a yeowl and made a dive under the lounge. Mr. Bowser walked up and down and blew out great clouds of smoke and looked as near like Richard Croker and George Washington as he knew how. Finding that the argument was at an end, he said:

"I am going out for a couple of hours. I have to meet the ward committee and arrange matters.

If I am not home by nine o'clock, you can go to bed."

She made no reply, and he clapped on his hat and passed out. He had arranged to meet the committee at a certain saloon, but he had not yet opened his own gate when a tough-looking man who was apparently waiting for him stepped forward and said:

"Say, old man, have you got a quarter in your clothes?"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Bowser. "Who are you, sir?"

"I hangs out in Plum street, and I controls thirty votes. Got to come and see me, old man, if you want to be Alderman. I wants a quarter now, and we'll arrange about de boodle later on."

"Sir, there will be no quarter and no boodle! I see now that you are a ward heeler, but don't think you can bleed me. Not a penny, sir!"

"Den you'll git de flip flop and come down like a house," growled the fellow as he slouched off.

On the corner a second one was waiting. He put himself in Mr. Bowser's road, and when he had halted him he said:

"Dis hollerin' fur a man is dry work, boss, and de boys want half a dollar to wet their whistles."

"Another heeler, eh? Well, you tell your crowd to drink water. How dare you block my way?"

"Den we's got a kicker, has we!" sneered the



man as he moved aside. "All right, old man! It's de gang what runs dis ward, and de gang will t'row you down wid a bang!"

At the door of the saloon was a group of three. Each one made a grab for a buttonhole as Mr. Bowser came up, and after a feeble cheer the leader asked for \$1 to "wet up" the boys who were waiting a few doors away.

"Look here!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser, as he elbowed them off. "Let me say to you right now and here that this is no lager beer campaign. There will be no drinking at my expense."

"Den dere won't be no votin' fur you!"

"All right. Do as you like."

Mr. Bowser entered the saloon to find the committee waiting. There were also a dozen outsiders. No one had spent any money for beer. Each one had held on to his thirst until the candidate could show up. Every man rose to his feet as Mr. Bowser entered, and the number who lined up at the bar was twenty-one.

"Is it beer fur de crowd?" asked the saloonist, with a bland smile.

"I did not come here to buy beer for a crowd," replied Mr. Bowser.

There was a moment of awful silence, and men turned pale. Then a murmur arose, and half a dozen men began cursing in loud tones. Some one might have laid hands on Mr. Bowser had not the



"NO, OLD MAN, DE CASE IS LIKE DIS! YOU——"



chairman of the committee lifted up his hand and his voice and said:

"It'll be all right, boys. De gent don't exactly catch on, and we've got to talk wid him in private. You chew your cotton till we have a little talk."

Mr. Bowser was escorted into a private room, and when he had taken a seat and the committee had heaved sighs over the empty glasses on the table, the chairman said:

"Now, old man, de case is like dis. You——"

"Why do you call me 'old man?'" demanded Mr. Bowser.

"Dat's friendly. You wants de boys wid you, of course. As I was sayin', old man, you wants to be Alderman of dis ward. Dere's a way to be elected, and dere's a way to be t'rown down. De way to be elected is to stand in wid de boys."

"And give them money and fill them up with beer?"

"Dat's de way. If there ain't anything in it fur de boys, den de boys don't enthuse, you know. Better go out and set 'em up fur de crowd as a beginner. I'd set 'em twice or three times."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser. "I propose to make a clean, decent campaign of this or withdraw. If you want to elect me for my integrity and my principles——"

"Hang your principles! Old man, will you come down with de foamy?"

"Never!"

"Den dis meeting is adjourned, and you ain't in it."

"But Mr. Bowser was in it. As he passed out into the barroom the gang began to hustle him. He fought back, and in a minute they were playing circus with him. How many times he was tossed back and forth and backed against the wall and bar he will never be able to figure out. Mrs. Bowser and the cat stood in the open door as he finally escaped and reached home. He had as many as five different limps in his legs. His back ached, his hat was crushed, his coat torn, and the dilapidation was complete.

"Well, Alderman Bowser?" she queried as he toiled painfully up the steps.

He made no reply.

"Or is it Mayor Bowser?"

He halted to glare at her, but uttered no word.

"The campaign must have opened lively," she persisted, as he reached the door.

He clutched the casing to steady himself and made one awful kick at the cat and missed. Then he slowly entered the hall, banged the door behind him, and the campaign was over.

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As Mr. Bowser sat smoking and reading the other evening the monotonous meow of a cat an-

noyed him until he put down his paper and queried of Mrs. Bowser:

"Do you know whether our cat is in the house or caught in a trap in the back yard?"

"I saw her in the dining-room a few minutes ago," was the reply. "The cat you hear meowing is a strange one and is up a shade tree in front of the house."

"But you never told me when I came home that there was a cat up a tree."

"Why should I? What have you got to do with a cat up a tree?"

"How long has that cat been up the tree?" he demanded, as he flushed up.

"Since about five o'clock."

"And how came she to go up there?"

"A dog was chasing her."

"And you—you have never moved hand or foot to rescue that poor creature from her perilous position!" he thundered, as he struck the wall a blow with his fist.

"I'm not climbing trees to rescue stray cats," answered Mrs. Bowser.

"That's you—that's you to a dot! Right in front of our own house a poor creature has been suffering for hours, and you have been too stony-hearted and indifferent to even inform me of the fact! It is monstrous, Mrs. Bowser, perfectly monstrous!"

"Have I hindered the cat from coming down

the tree?" she protested. "Do you expect that every time I see a dog with a tin can tied to his tail run past the house I am going to follow him?"

"But you haven't a grain of mercy in your soul!" he went on. "It is your utter indifference, your callous-heartedness, that I complain of. Ah! there is our cat. Suppose she were up a tree over on Beach street and suffering untold agonies of mind. What would you say to a woman who would listen to her plaintive calls for mercy without stirring a finger?"

"I'd say it was our cat's business to keep out of trees."

The Bowser cat had walked in from the kitchen to take a look at things, and something like a grin spread over her face as she realized that there was a row on.

"Heaven help the human being with such a heart as you have!" groaned Mr. Bowser, as he started down the hall. "That cat is coming down from that tree if I have to get out the whole Fire Department. In some home near by there are innocent little children crying because she has not come home. They shall cry no more."

He clapped on his hat and went out on the steps, and his own cat followed. In a shade tree in front of the gate the starlight showed him the strange cat. He went down to the tree and began calling and coaxing. There seemed to be no good



reason why she shouldn't come down, as it is as easy for a cat to descend as to go up, but the feline remained fast to a limb. Mr. Bowser went to the kitchen after a stepladder. As he brought it out and placed it against the tree two men came along and halted. He had climbed half-way up the ladder when three more came along. Then came two boys, and he offered one of them a nickel to go up and bring the cat down.

"I'm no cheap kid," was the reply. "If I go up after dat cat, she'll bite me, and cat-bites mean six months in de hospital. It's fifty cents or I don't go."

"What's the use, anyhow?" queried the eighth person who came along. "If a cat is fool enough to climb a tree, let her be fool enough to come down again."

"Men," said Mr. Bowser, as he looked around him, "have you no hearts? Would you deliberately permit the helpless to suffer?"

"But if she is sufferin', why don't she come down?" protested three or four voices in chorus.

"Because she's lost her nerve. I wouldn't have believed that such cruelty existed in the Twentieth Century."

And Mr. Bowser got to the top of the stepladder and hung to the tree and coaxed again. The cat was ten feet beyond him and refused to stir. He increased his offer to the boy to ten cents,

but it was refused. He must either climb the tree or back down, and the reader knows that Mr. Bowser is a man who never gives up unless knocked unconscious.

"Say, you can't climb that tree!" shouted one of the crowd below, as he witnessed the preparations.

"But I shall!"

"Bet you 10 to 1 you come down kerplunk! You are too fat and loggy. Better cut the tree down."

People had been coming along and halting, and the crowd now numbered a score. Of the fifteen different remarks addressed to Mr. Bowser as his feet left the stepladder not one was replied to. He was too busy. His first move ripped his coat under each arm and barked his knees, and the crowd yelled and applauded. There was a momentary hesitation, and then he went ahead and tore a piece of cloth out of one leg of his trousers and ripped two buttons off his vest. The applause that followed was enthusiastic and sincere, and one of the crowd followed it with:

"Well, if any one had told me that that old duffer was such a monkey to climb, I wouldn't have believed it!"

By the time the crowd had numbered fifty Mr. Bowser was almost within reach of the cat. His eyes were glassy and his jaw set. He knew that Mrs. Bowser was watching him from a front win-

dow and that he had not one sympathizer in the crowd, but he would accomplish his object if death overtook him in the doing of it. He now got a toe hold on a limb and reached for the cat, but the feline spat at him and jumped away, and as he started back the limb broke, and there was a Fourth of July yell from the crowd below. Mr. Bowser descended like a load of brick, but, fortunately, the stepladder was below to receive him. He struck it in a heap and twisted around till he lay across it on his stomach, and he heard far-off voices saying:

"Somebody go to the drug store and ring for an ambulance."

"Didn't the old coon know more than to climb a tree? Who knows where he lives?"

"Dere's a woman comin' out, and mebbe she owns him," called a boy as Mrs. Bowser appeared.

She soon settled all doubts of her ownership. She asked assistance to lower Mr. Bowser from the stepladder, and when he had been straightened out as well as possible four men volunteered to carry him into the house. He knew he was being carried, but he made no resistance. He knew when they bumped his back along the hall floor and left him in a disorganized heap in the sitting room, and he plainly caught a voice which said:

"Here he is, ma'am, and, though he ain't dead, he'll probably let cats alone after this. When a cat

gits up a tree, it's her bizness to git down ag'in. Lands alive, but he must be a queer man to pay any attention to cats!"

Little by little Mr. Bowser recovered from the shock. He opened his eyes and saw the family cat and Mrs. Bowser watching and waiting. He sat up and decided on what he would do, and as he crawled over to the lounge and sat down on it he hoarsely whispered:

"Woman, do you think I'll ever forgive you if I live to be a thousand years old! Think of me—Mrs. Bowser! Think of the ridicule and contempt!"

"The cat came down while they were bringing you in," she quietly replied.

"Do you mean—mean——"

"I mean that the cat came down. She could have come any time. If you haven't any papers to look over in the library and don't want to see your lawyer about a divorce, you'd better go to bed.

And Mr. Bowser went.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HE HAS THREE DAYS OF SICKNESS.

Mr. Bowser had been complaining for a fortnight of twinges in his legs, but had scorned Mrs. Bowser's advice to use liniment. He got his feet wet as he came home the other night in a thunder shower, and at bedtime he suddenly discovered that he had a very decided limp in his left leg. While he was wondering if he had been sitting down on a broken bottle all the evening a limp struck the other leg, and, hanging to the back of his chair, he exclaimed:

"By John, Mrs. Bowser, but what in thunder has got into my legs? I don't believe I can walk three steps."

"It's rheumatism, probably," she replied, "and you ought to attend to it very sharply. Your legs must be well rubbed with liniment."

"You—you don't mean that I've actually got rheumatism!" he whispered as he grew white around the mouth.

"I'm sure of it. I think you've had it hanging about you for some weeks."

"And rheumatism ties a man up in knots and often goes to his heart and kills him like a bullet?"

"Yes."

Mr. Bowser grew paler, and his chin quivered, but as Mrs. Bowser began to express her hopes that this was only a mild attack and would yield readily to treatment, he took a sudden resolve and almost sternly said:

"Well, we won't worry. Whatever it is, I will bear it like a man. I may be a cripple in the house for months or years, but you won't hear one word of complaint from me."

He managed to get up stairs after a good deal of trouble, and after his legs had been rubbed and he had been helped into bed he felt so much better that he went to sleep. When he awoke in the morning, however, it was a different thing. His legs were almost as stiff as crowbars, and the doctor arrived to warn him that he was good for three days in bed. He was asked to exercise patience and keep a cheerful spirit, and he replied:

"Not one complaint shall be heard from me, doctor, and I'll whistle and sing all the time."

#### DAY THE FIRST.

That was the way day the first started in. The doctor had been gone exactly four minutes, when Mr. Bowser suddenly exclaimed:

"By gum, but you are taking it cool for a woman with a dying husband!"

"But what can I do?" asked Mrs. Bowser.

"You can turn my pillow over, rub my feet, give me that camphor, get me the morning paper, bring me a cigar. A loving wife would think of a hundred things to do."

During that first day Mr. Bowser was assisted to turn over in bed twenty-eight times, his pillow was elevated or lowered thirty-four times, he smelt of the camphor bottle twenty-two times, and he had his feet rubbed fourteen times. The window of his bedroom was raised or lowered thirty-six times, and he had four kinds of broth and twelve special dishes. He made twenty-three predictions as to being dead in the morning. All this, and yet at ten o'clock at night he said to Mrs. Bowser:

"If you have no interest in this case, just let me know, and I'll hire a trained nurse."

#### DAY THE SECOND.

Day the second really began one minute after midnight, as Mr. Bowser awoke at that instant and complained of a jerky sensation in one of his big toes. At two o'clock he had cold streaks, at four it was hot streaks, at five his knees were numb, and at seven he felt a fluttering of the heart. During the day he sat up and lay down, groaned and whistled, predicted that he would live for twenty



years and that he would die before night. A neighbor, who had heard of his illness, called to tender his sympathies, and Mr. Bowser took advantage of the occasion to remark:

"This is a serious case, and of course I am suffering as if on the rack, but you notice how calmly I take it. I am not a man to make complaints, and even with death staring me in the face I am trying to preserve a cheerful demeanor."

Mr. Bowser wanted beer, ginger ale and lemonade. He wanted strawberries and jellies and ice cream. He insisted that Mrs. Bowser telephone his condition to the doctor every hour, and yet he declared that the family physician didn't know enough to doctor a dizzy headed cat. He set out with tears in his eyes to tell Mrs. Bowser what to do as a widow, but at the end of ten minutes charged her with a desire to see him "planted" so that she could marry again. Of the fifteen special dishes prepared for him he sipped at one or two, and when night came he drew up his knees, with a sigh, and groaned out:

"I should have gone to the hospital in the first place. I might have known that I couldn't get any attention in my own house."

#### DAY THE THIRD.

Mr. Bowser began this day at one o'clock in the morning. He awoke Mrs. Bowser to inform her

that he had a feeling in the small of his back as if a cold flatiron was resting there. An hour later he aroused her again to ask her if an itching heel was a good sign. He and his heel got along somehow until six o'clock, and then he demanded that she go down and club a fish peddler who was shouting his stock. During that day he threatened the life of the cat twelve different times, he called the doctor a quack twenty-one times, and he made use of over sixty cuss words. Mrs. Bowser cooked beef, mutton and chicken in every way known to woman, but he found fault with each dish as it was presented. His feet were too high or his head too low, and the bed either had a hollow or a hump in it. Not for three minutes at a time was he quiet or satisfied, but at five o'clock in the afternoon Mrs. Bowser had to go down to the kitchen to show the new cook about her work. Half an hour later as she started up stairs she almost screamed out as she glanced into the sitting room. There stood Mr. Bowser fully dressed and bowing and smiling as the cat rubbed his legs and purred.

"You—you here!" she gasped in astonishment.

"I am here, Mrs. Bowser," he blandly answered.

"But your rheumatism?"

"Rheumatism? Yes, I was at death's door with rheumatism, but I brought my will power to bear

on the physical, and this is the result. You would have lain there and died."

"But I don't understand."

"Simply because you don't know your husband. I could have filled the house with complaints, but I uttered not one word. I could have folded my arms and died, but I willed it otherwise. Let this be a great moral lesson to you, Mrs. Bowser, and behold—"

And he went waltzing around the room with his knees as limber as springs and the cat following after, while Mrs. Bowser raised her hands in astonishment and said to herself:

"Was there ever another man in all this world like Mr. Bowser?"

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Mr. Bowser had been acting mysteriously for four or five days. A long-haired, wild-eyed man had rung the doorbell and asked for him at different hours and had twice held secret interviews with him in the library, and twice he had dressed up in his best on a weekday and gone out for a couple of hours. Mrs. Bowser had asked no questions, knowing that the facts would come in due time, but the cook had volunteered the information that the long-haired man was an anarchist and was coaxing Mr. Bowser to blow up three or four churches with bombs. Things came to a climax, and the mystery was solved after dinner the other

evening. Mr. Bowser came home in the best of humor, and when ready to sit down he said:

"My dear, you will probably remember that I became a member of the Good Night club a few months ago?"

"Yes, I believe I do," she answered.

"I haven't attended very regularly, but it seems that I have made something of a hit just the same. The club desires a crayon of me to hang on the walls of the parlor."

"But you never attended but one night."

"N-o, I guess not; but the members appeared to be struck by what I said."

"What did you say? You didn't make a speech, and I think you came home and told me that things were slow."

"No matter what I said," retorted Mr. Bowser, with a nettled feeling at being boxed up. "The club wants my picture and is going to get it. I consider it one of the greatest honors ever paid me."

"So that man with flying hair and wild eyes was an artist?" she queried.

"One of the best in town. He wanted a photograph as well as three or four sittings, and he has turned out something to be proud of. I am expecting it to arrive any minute. I wanted you to see it and give me your opinion before I sent it to the club."

"So that's what you were up to? Well, I hope it is a good likeness. Who is the artist?"

"Name's Parini, I believe, and he belongs to the Italian school. He's a jim dandy at crayon work, and his prices are very moderate. If he wasn't hoping to get other orders from the club he'd never have touched this for fifty dollars. With frame and all it only stands me seventy dollars."

Mrs. Bowser's heart sank, but she tried to keep her feelings out of her face, and Mr. Bowser smiled and continued:

"The attitude will probably surprise you. I stand with my left hand on my breast—so—and my right lifted to heaven."

"But what for?"

"To make a strong picture, like those of the ancients."

Mrs. Bowser choked up and could say no more, and the cat walked round and round Mr. Bowser with a broad grin on her phiz. The silence was threatening to be painful when the doorbell rang and a boy left the picture. Mr. Bowser insisted that Mrs. Bowser retire while he removed the wrappings and placed it on an easel under the light, and it was ten minutes before he called that all was ready.

"Behold, Bowser, the philosopher!" he said, as he stepped back with a wave of the hand.

She beheld him—that is, she beheld the picture



"I CAN'T SAY I LIKE IT," SHE HALF SOBBED.





of a man who seemed to be suffering with colic and trying to reach down a bottle of pain killer from the top shelf of the pantry. It was not only the work of an amateur, but he seemed to have caricatured his subject. Mr. Bowser stood on one leg as if it were a hitching post, and the other was lifted as if his corns troubled him. The neck was half as long as the body, one shoulder was badly lopped, and the feet were only a little smaller than beer kegs.

"Give it a careful looking over before you give me your opinion," said Mr. Bowser, as he rubbed his hands and smiled.

She did. She saw that one corner of the mouth was drawn up, the eyes had a decided squint, and there was nose enough for two men. If Mr. Bowser had been on a three days' spree and then fallen foul of a thrashing machine he might have slightly resembled that crayon; but taking him normally there was not a familiar line. As Mrs. Bowser continued to look her eyes filled with tears and she choked up.

"Well?" he asked, after awhile.

"I—I can't say that I like it," she half sobbed.

"But what's the matter?"

"It's botch work."

"What! What!" he shouted in tones that jumped the cat. "You tell me that it's botch work!"

"Nothing could be worse. There are hundreds

of school children who could have done better. Even the frame is a swindle. If you paid twenty dollars for it you were outrageously robbed. Oh, why did you let him do it!"

"You—you stand here and talk this way about a work of art! You dare to criticise such a work! You—you—! Woman, retire to your room! It's plain to me that you don't know art from oatmeal, and I was a fool for showing you the picture!"

Mrs. Bowser gladly retired, and the cat gladly followed, and Mr. Bowser was promenading up and down with a red face when the bell rang again. He went to the door to find a member of the Good Night club on the steps who had no sooner been invited in than he said:

"I called to give you warning. A scrub of a sketchist named Parini is going about under false pretenses. He claims that the club wants crayons of members to hang on the walls and he does botch work and charges a swindling price. Look out for him."

"He's a—a scrub?" faltered Mr. Bowser.

"A regular scrub."

"And the Good Night club doesn't want my picture?"

"Of course not. You are hardly known by name yet. Just turn the fellow down hard if he comes round. Good night."

Mrs. Bowser had heard all from the top of the

stairs. At first she thought she would go down, but she did not want to make it more painful for Mr. Bowser. She heard him return to the sitting room, she heard him talking to himself, and then she heard a whoop and a crash. He had seized that crayon with the heroic attitude and a smash—and then he had jumped all over it and blotted it off the face of the earth. By and by there was silence and she went to bed. It was half an hour before he came up, and he was still breathing hard and carried the red in his face. She counterfeited sleep, and with a sigh of relief he made ready for dreamland.

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Mr. Bowser had a large package under his arm as he came home to dinner the other evening, and when Mrs. Bowser expressed her curiosity as to the contents, he replied:

“Never you mind until by and by. It’s a little surprise, but it will keep.”

During the dinner hour he chuckled many times to himself and smiled in a triumphant way, but it was not until they had reached the sitting room that the mystery was solved. Then he untied the package with the greatest of care, and after removing half a dozen different wraps he tenderly lifted up and held aloft an old blue platter and proudly exclaimed:

“Behold the gem, Mrs. Bowser.”

"It's a platter," she said, after a long look.

"Yes, it's a platter, and to your eye it probably appears to be nothing but a platter. I presume if you saw this thing out in the back yard you would kick it aside as worthless."

"Well, I shouldn't be much struck on an old platter with seven nicks and two cracks in it. Did you bring it home to feed the cat on?"

"To feed the cat on!" echoed Mr. Bowser, as he backed off and waved the platter around his head. "Woman, haven't you an iota of sense in your head? An idiot fresh from an asylum would not have asked a tomfool question like that."

"Then what is it for?"

"What is it for? What are rubies and diamonds and old master paintings for? Why do people pay fabulous prices for goblin tapestry and old books?"

"Gobelin tapestry, my dear," she corrected.

"Gobelin nothing. I said goblin, and I meant it. . Don't make any mistake on me, Mrs. Bowser. When I don't know what I'm talking about, I'll keep my mouth shut. I was admiring goblin tapestry while you were in short dresses and eating bread and butter with sugar on it. There'd be a piece of it lying around now if you hadn't taken it for an old stocking leg and burned it up. To feed the cat on—humph!"

And he tenderly placed his gem of a platter on

the mantel and went walking around with a glare in his eye, and the family cat looked out at him from under the piano and made up her mind that Mrs. Bowser would be lucky to get out of it without a row. There was silence for three or four minutes, and then Mr. Bowser halted in his promenade to take a loving look at the platter and to softly exclaim:

"By John, but she's a beauty, a priceless gem! I can't yet realize how lucky I am. Those decorations simply melt into each other, and the softness over all is like the mist of a June morning. If I only had a wife with a soul to appreciate such things!"

"I will do my best to appreciate it if you will explain things to me," said Mrs. Bowser.

"That is more reasonable in you. Not being born with a soul for the beautiful, you cannot fully appreciate such a work of art as this, but I will aid you all I can. This platter, to begin with, is the rarest of old china."

"Who said it was?"

"There you go, the first thing! Can't you take my word for it? If you can't, then let me tell you a man who has dealt in bric-a-brac for the last thirty years has assured me that there are not a dozen other pieces like this in the known world. This platter was once the property of Marie Antoinette."

"He said that, did he?"

"Of course he said it, and what object could he have had in lying about it? If he was deceiving me, he might as well have said that it belonged to Susan B. Anthony. Yes, the ill-fated queen used to eat her dinner off this platter."

"I wonder if she made these nicks with her teeth?" innocently queried Mrs. Bowser, as she examined the relic with more interest.

"She probably did," replied Mr. Bowser, struck with the new idea and raising the value of his gem 50 per cent in consequence.

"Did you have to pay a pretty high price for it?"

"Well, pretty stiff, but I got it for less than its value. I had helped the dealer to sell Green an old teapot once used by Queen Elizabeth, and he felt he owed me something."

"Was the snout of the teapot missing?"

"No, of course not. Why do you ask such a question?"

"I didn't know but Queen Elizabeth bit it off some day while drinking cold tea."

Mr. Bowser turned red and white and breathed hard, and it was all he could do to hang on to himself. He wanted to talk platter to some one, however, and have some one rejoice with him over his luck, and so he swallowed his anger and said:

"As soulless as you are, you can see that it's worth \$50, can't you?"

"You don't mean it!" gasped Mrs. Bowser.

"Of course I mean it—that is, I mean I paid \$50 for a platter worth twice or three times that. Why, if it was known that I would sell this relic for \$75 our house couldn't hold the rush of would-be buyers."

"It would be dreadful if the old platter didn't turn out to be worth 15 cents," observed Mrs. Bowser, as she turned away.

"Woman, what in thunder do you mean?" demanded Mr. Bowser, as he jumped around. "Do you dare insinuate that I paid \$50 for a relic not worth powder to blow it up?"

At that moment the doorbell rang, and a neighbor was admitted. It so happened that she was fairly well posted on old china, and Mr. Bowser knew she was. She had scarcely bustled in when she caught sight of the platter and ran to get a closer look.

"One of your pick ups?" she queried of Mr. Bowser.

"One of my purchases, ma'am," he stiffly replied.

"Ah, I see! Perhaps you bought it for old china?"

"I did."

"Of a man who goes around with samples?"



"Yes'm."

"Well, I hope you got a bargain."

"A decided bargain. In paying \$50 for that platter I don't think I paid half its real value."

"My stars, Mr. Bowser," exclaimed the woman, "but you don't mean to say you paid \$50 for that!"

"And why not?"

"Because it's a cheat and a fraud. There's no old china about it. That man came into my husband's office one day a week ago when I was there and tried to sell this very platter to us for \$15. He said it used to belong to George III. and that his favorite dog ate meat off it. He offered it for \$5 before he got through, but I'd sooner have a platter picked up in somebody's back yard. I wish I had known you were looking for such things, as I could have saved you from being swindled."

"Thank you, ma'am," he sarcastically replied, "but I am very well satisfied with my bargain."

"You believe it valuable?"

"I know it is."

"And worth what you paid for it?"

"Twice or three times over."

"Then, of course, there's nothing more to say."

The women presently went up stairs to talk over spring house-cleaning, and Mr. Bowser and the cat and the Marie Antoinette-George III. platter were left alone. The cat at once assumed an innocent, solicitous expression of countenance,

but Mr. Bowser was not to be deceived. After a swift look at her he made a sudden jump for the mantel and seized the priceless gem with both hands, and with a wild whoop he sought to bring it down on the feline's head. It struck the back of a chair, however, and as it was shattered into a hundred pieces he jumped up and down on the fragments and the cat escaped into the hall.

"For mercy's sake, what is that?" asked the caller as she heard the whoop and the crash.

"I—I think the cat has knocked down a vase," replied Mrs. Bowser, as her heart stopped beating for a moment.

They both listened intently, but all was silence below. Mr. Bowser had sat down on the lounge to do some whispered swearing.

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When Mr. Bowser reached home the other evening, he was so deeply interested in a book in his hand that he almost passed his own gate, and when Mrs. Bowser expressed her curiosity he absently explained:

"It is a book on botany, and I haven't been so interested for years."

During the dinner hour he consulted the book at intervals and seemed lost to his surroundings, and it was not until they had finished that he aroused himself and said:

"Mrs. Bowser, you know what mayweed is, of

course? It is to be found along all the highways in the Northern States."

"Yes, I know," she replied.

"What sort of a plant is it?"

"Why, it's mayweed."

"I should have answered the same way three hours ago, but I know better now. This little book on botany has been posting me up. Mrs. Bowser, mayweed is a composite plant, and the Latin name for it is *Maruta cotula*."

"Well, what of it?" she asked.

"What of it? Why, for the first time in your life you know what mayweed is. In future when you hear anybody talking about *Maruta cotula* you'll know they mean mayweed instead of corn-meal. You have been familiar with horse radish for years, but do you know what sort of a plant it is?"

"It's horse radish, of course."

"Ah-um! Mrs. Bowser, let me inform you that horse radish is a plant of the genus *nasturtium*, having a root of pungent taste. It's a wonder the grocer hasn't tried to make you believe that string beans were horse radish. There is a common weed along the highways generally called horseweed. Do you know anything about it?"

"Why should I care to?" she asked.

"In order to add to your knowledge. Horseweed, as I take pleasure in informing you, is a

composite plant of the species *Erigeron canadense*, and if you will impress it upon your memory you won't get it mixed up with peanut shucks or popcorn. Let me ask what you know about catnip."

"Are you going to take this thing up as a fad?"

"Woman, I have no fads, as you well know," he replied, with great dignity. "I simply desire to know all about things and add to my stock of knowledge. If you weren't as obstinate as a mule, you'd be glad to pick up this study with me. Catnip is a plant of strong scent and belongs to the species—"

"To the species cat," she interrupted.

Mr. Bowser glared at her over his spectacles, and his face grew red as paint. The cat, which sat looking up at him and feeling anxious to hear all about catnip, hoped there would be no row, and there was none. Choking back his anger, he quietly observed:

"Very well, Mrs. Bowser. If you want to be a blockhead and an ignoramus, I have no objections. I am now going to walk out into the suburbs to study botany, and you can sit around home and make mud pies. If I should be late, you needn't sit up for me."

"If you'll wait until I can put my hat on, I'll go with you," she replied.

"But I don't want you. A woman who glories

in the fact that she can't tell a burdock from a bullfrog would be no company for me."

Mr. Bowser had proceeded for half a mile before he struck a rich field. Then he came upon an old woman minding her cow on the commons, and as he culled and held up to her gaze a late dandelion he kindly observed:

"My good woman, you probably know that this flower belongs to the genus leontodon."

"Well, what if I do?" she surlily replied.

"It derives its name from lion or lion's tooth."

"And what of it?"

"Nothing in particular, but I should think you would be glad to know. Here is a burdock, but do you know to what genus it belongs?"

"What do you want around here?" she asked as she looked at him in no friendly way.

"I am studying botany, madam," replied Mr. Bowser.

"And what's that?"

"The knowledge of plants and flowers. I assure you, madam—"

"You go on, old man. If my husband catches you out here trying to flirt with me, he'll break your neck with one blow. You ought to be ashamed of yourself at your age."

"Trying to flirt with you!" he repeated, as he gazed at her in astonishment.

"That's it, you sly old fox, and you move on



"WHAT BUSINESS IS IT OF YOURS?" DEMANDED THE MAN  
BEHIND THE GATE.





before Jimmy comes home. Your poor wife is probably at the washtub while you are strolling around and trying to make a mash."

Mr. Bowser passed on. A block or two away he came upon a citizen smoking his pipe over his gate, and just there he also came across a generous bunch of smartweed. Culling a few stems, he advanced to the man and said:

"I presume you know this to be smartweed?"

"If I didn't, I'd be a fool," was the reply.

"Do you know what genus it belongs to?"

"Mebbe I do or I don't, but don't try any tricks on me."

"It is a plant of the genus polygonum, so called on account of its acrimony. My friend, you ought to be posted on what is growing at your own door."

"And what business is it of yours?" demanded the man, as he bristled up. "Say, now, you'd better move on. I've had four geese stolen, and if you think to get another you'll find yourself in the hospital."

The man looked so threatening that Mr. Bowser didn't stop for further argument. He wandered on till he came to a lane running up to some sheds, and before him was a thistle as large as a bushel basket. He turned to the proper heading in his book and read to himself:

"One of the numerous prickly plants of the

class syngenesia. The thistle is the national emblem of Scotland."

Mr. Bowser's face was wearing a complacent smile and he was feeling to pity Mrs. Bowser's ignorance on the thistle question when there was a sudden great racket in the sheds above. He was hesitating between the racket and a specimen of the mullein, a plant of the genus *verbascum*, when a drove of about forty hogs came rushing down the lane. Why they rushed was a mystery to him, but rush they did, and in his surprise he stood his ground until too late. The hogs seemed to be thoroughly alarmed and also to feel that they had the right of way, and as Mr. Bowser sprang for the fence at last a big black porker knocked the legs from under him. As he went down and rolled over, about twenty of the hogs climbed over him, and when the last had passed, his book on botany was a wreck, his hat a pancake, and he was covered with dust from head to foot. Half an hour later he opened his own gate and passed in, leaving the crowd of boys, who had followed the circus, on the outside. Mrs. Bowser and the cat sat on the front steps. When they had made out what it was scuffling its way up to the steps, she quietly asked:

"Well, dear, did you find that pigweed belongs to the genus goosefoot, and is an annual weed found in the gardens?"

Mr. Bowser leaned against the steps and looked at her and opened and shut his mouth.

"And the mushroom, you know," she continued — "it is one of a large class of cryptogramic plants of the natural order of fungi. Did you bring home a specimen?"

He drew himself part way up the steps and glared at her, and the cat began to tremble as she said:

"After you had gone I began to wonder if the burdock belonged to the genus lappa or was a species of xanthium. Have you found out?"

Mr. Bowser lifted his feet with groans, entered the front door with sighs, and as he drew himself up stairs and she called to him he swore softly, but earnestly, and vowed that he would get even if it took a hundred years.

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On his way home the other evening, Mr. Bowser had his feet stepped on, his hat knocked off and his ribs poked by umbrellas, and by the time he reached home he was ready for a row. To add fuel to his feelings he found that his mother-in-law had arrived two hours before and was comfortably installed at the head of affairs, while Mrs. Bowser had gone to bed with a headache. Formal greetings had scarcely been exchanged when he said:

"What's all this twaddle about headache? When I left the house this morning, Mrs. Bowser was

as chirp as a cricket. Mighty funny that a headache should flop her into bed all at once."

"There's nothing funny about it," promptly replied the mother-in-law. "She had a nervous headache, and I told her to go to bed. She looks to me as if her nerves were all racked to pieces, and she ought to go home with me for a year."

"That's all nonsense. Her nerves are all right—as right as mine. She's probably been sloshing around in the rain and got her feet wet, and if so, she will get no pity from me."

"You are not asked nor expected to pity her, sir, and if you want any dinner you'd better eat it now. I found the cook very lazy and impudent and trying to run things to suit herself, and therefore I discharged her. I've managed to cook a little something myself, however."

"You—you discharged the cook at an hour's notice!" he exclaimed, with flushed face.

"I gave her seventeen minutes to get out. I'd like to see a cook or any one else trying to walk over my daughter."

Mr. Bowser sat down to the table, with his gorge in his throat. The mother-in-law had thrown down the gauntlet, and he had picked it up.

"It is a picked-up dinner," she explained, as she brought it from the kitchen. "This is one of my Irish stews, and I know you'll like it."

"A stew for dinner!" he gasped, as his eyes began to roll.

"Certainly, and not much besides, but if it's good enough for me it's good enough for you. I've heard about your finding fault with your dinners, but you can either eat this or let it alone. When a man gets the idea that a house is run for his benefit only, it's time he was brought to book."

Mr. Bowser meant to jump up and pound on the table and declare that he was master of his own house and wouldn't eat Irish stew for dinner if he starved to death; but, to his intense surprise, he not only clung to his chair, but actually found himself eating the stew. There was something in the icy glare of the woman that had a restraining influence on his impetuosity. The coffee was weak and the potatoes underdone, and he had opened his mouth to declare that he wouldn't ask a hog to sit down to such a meal, when the mother-in-law fastened her eyes on him and said:

"You just keep quiet and be thankful for what you've got. I've known husbands to make a dinner on raw turnips!"

The pudding was flavored with vanilla, and had Mrs. Bowser been there, Mr. Bowser would have made her heart ache for a month, but those icy eyes checked his outbreak and even compelled him to eat rather generously. It was only when dinner was finished and they had returned to the

sitting room that he determined to shake off the incubus and assert his independence.

"I think I'll go over to the club for two or three hours this evening," he observed, as he toyed with the cat.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" replied the mother-in-law, as she wheeled on him. "You'll sit right here and see if a doctor is wanted or if there are any errands to be done. The idea of your loafing around a club when your wife is almost too sick to speak! If you had a soft corn on your toe the whole house would have to hover over you."

Mr. Bowser choked and strangled in his indignation, and the cat grinned and said to herself that things would break loose pretty soon.

"And I've heard," continued the woman, as her teeth clicked together, "that you play poker at the club and sometimes lose as much as \$10 of an evening. I wish you were my husband for about an hour! You'd never play poker more than once."

"Did you come out here to insult and abuse me?" demanded Mr. Bowser, with a flash of independence.

"I came out here to straighten things up, and I shall do it!" she sternly replied.

Then followed a powerful silence, broken at last by his going down to the cellar to nail a board

on the coalbin. He had just started to drive a nail when the mother-in-law appeared on the stairs and said:

"Drop that hammer like a hot potato! Don't you know that every blow goes through your poor wife's head with a bang? You've got about as much heart in you as a rhinoceros."

"Woman, how dare you talk to me like that!" he shouted, as his face grew white as flour.

"Don't call me 'woman' and yell out that way!" she replied. "No bulldozer can scare me a cent's worth. If you want something to do, go up and sit with your wife while I wash up the dishes."

Mr. Bowser sulked for a few minutes and then walked upstairs. Finding Mrs. Bowser asleep, he thought it would be a good thing to overhaul his dresser. He had scarcely pulled out one of the drawers when he discovered a sock with a hole in the heel. Indignation overcame him on the instant, and he flourished the sock on high and exclaimed:

"So this is the way my house is run, is it! Here's a sock that I bought new two weeks ago and never had on my foot, and yet some one has worn a hole in the heel!"

"Is—is it you?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as she woke up.

"Yes, it is me, and what about this sock? Look



at it! Behold this specimen of wifely interest in her husband's welfare! Is it any wonder—"

The mother-in-law appeared at that moment, and, pointing to the stairs, she said:

"You and your holey sock get out o' this as fast as you can!"

Mr. Bowser got. Something in her he feared—some element of mastery—but as they returned to the sitting room he shook off the feeling and hoarsely whispered:

"There is a train at ten o'clock in the morning! You can go by that!"

"If I do, it'll be as a corpse!" she grimly replied. "Sit down there! Now, then, I want to tell you a few things. You are a bulldozing husband, and it would do you good to be hit across the neck with a crowbar. You think you know it all, and you are bound to have your way over everybody. No other woman in this world except your wife would live with you two hours, and she's a fool for doing it. You never come home except to kick about something, and if I was your wife I'd scald you. You talk about waste and extravagance, and yet you'd buy sand for sugar if left alone. You boss and browbeat and roar and bellow, but in a week I'll have you as humble as a cat. It's all in the right woman getting hold of you."

"And you'll stay a week!" groaned Mr. Bowser.

"Four of them!" she replied. "And I'll work a

remarkable change in you or know the reason why. It won't do you a mite of good to roll your eyes, chank your teeth and crack your toes. You've got to cuddle right down like a barrel of molasses. Don't go upstairs again till bedtime, and if there's any more rows over holeysocks you'll go barefoot in your shoes the rest of the winter!"

She went to the kitchen to finish the dishes, and the cat crept over to Mr. Bowser and rubbed against his leg and purred in sympathy. The room seemed to stifle him, and he got up and walked softly down the hall and out on the step, followed by the cat, and they sat down side by side on the step and gazed into vacancy. A tramp halted at the gate and asked for a loan of a dime to get victuals for his vitals, but Mr. Bowser and the cat gazed on—gazed at vacancy and realized that the end of the world was close at hand.









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